

TOS 104



# British Birds

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Hen Harriers in North-east Scotland

Scarce migrants 2013: passerines





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# One wild day in Kakadu

How do you cover Australia's biggest national park in a single day? The answer, of course, is that you can't. This vast wilderness of wetlands, savannahs and escarpments spans half the size of Switzerland and would take a lifetime to explore. Nonetheless, you can certainly pack a lot into 24 hours if you know where to go.

There's no better way to greet the day than a cruise on Yellow Water Billabong, at the very heart of the park. Skeins of Magpie Geese, egrets, ibis and other water birds will already be commuting overhead as your boat nudges out from the jetty. With the dawn mist rising, you'll soon spy the serrated profile of your first saltwater crocodile, gliding silently across the limpid waters.

As your boat meanders deeper into the wetland, birds are everywhere: a shy Black Bittern flapping away from the roots of a pandanus; a dazzling Azure Kingfisher dashing past; a White-bellied Sea Eagle wheeling overhead. The salties haul themselves out on to the banks as the morning warms up, jaws agape, prompting agile wallabies to detour nervously as they approach to slake their thirst.

Back for a slap-up breakfast, you still have most of the day ahead of you – and time to make an excursion deeper into the park. With a picnic lunch packed you could head south to the spectacular cascade at Jim Jim Falls. Here, in the dry season, you can hike through monsoon forest and clamber up to a picture-perfect pool where the water plunges 150m over the surrounding cliffs. Or head northeast to the East Alligator River, where circular walks through the riverside monsoon forest bring black fruit bats and other wildlife, and there is excellent barramundi fishing for anglers.

Humans have inhabited Kakadu for more than 40,000 years and no visit would be complete without a glimpse of the park's ancient culture. In the cooler late afternoon, you could head to one of the outstanding rock art galleries, such as Nourlangie, where scenes of sorcery, hunting and creation myths are daubed natural pigments

across the sandstone cave walls. Continuing along the trail to Gun-warddehwardde lookout brings outstanding views across Kakadu's rugged escarpment – and more excitement for the birder, with such local specialities as Sandstone Shrike-thrush and Chestnut-quilled Rock Pigeon.

Indeed, wherever you travel through the day, birding is never off the Kakadu agenda. Not only does every billabong teem with water birds, but the savannah woodland also brings the likes of honeyeaters, cockatoos and fairy wrens. And, for the vigilant, there is always a chance of a rarity – perhaps a party of Gouldian Finches at a roadside creek or a Red Goshawk gliding overhead.

Night falls quickly in the tropical Top End – time to return to your resort. If you're staying back at Cooinda Lodge, near Yellow Water, you could sample some Kakadu specials, such as barramundi or wild goose pie. Dining out under the stars, a chorus of frogs, the yapping of barking owls and other night noises will remind you of exactly where you are.

Indeed, your 24 hours is still not up. Before turning in, you could – if you still have the energy – take a guided wander along the boardwalk to discover the nocturnal life of the billabong. A sweep of your torch beam should reveal crocodile eyes glowing red in the water and jewel-like tree frogs crouched among the vegetation. You may even surprise a foraging brown bandicoot or spy a handsome carpet python wrapped around the roots of a paperbark tree. Kakadu never sleeps, even if you now have to.



Magpie Geese



Gouldian Finch



# Surprises on Kangaroo Island

**You freeze as a large kangaroo lollops out of the bush and into the clearing. Two more appear – one with a joey in its pouch. You're amazed. But what did you expect? This is Kangaroo Island, after all.**

It's early morning in Flinders Chase National Park, and the wildlife is coming thick and fast on your pre-breakfast stroll. Just outside your cabin you'd been amazed to find a short-beaked echidna digging into a crumbling log. Oblivious to your clicking camera, this spiny, egg-laying mammal lapped with flickering tongue at the panicking termites that swarmed out. Now, as the roos bound away out of sight, your attention turns to the birds flocking into a flowering gum tree overhead. They're honeyeaters, come to feast on the bountiful nectar. Your binoculars pick out the slim forms and delicate markings of Purple-gaped Honey-eater, Crescent Honey-eater and Eastern Spinebill.

Back at breakfast, as you plan the day, you tuck into some honey of your own – harvested from the island's pure-strain Ligurian bees. Kangaroo Island, just a 30-minute hop from Adelaide, is not only a wildlife haven but also an exceptional destination for lovers of local foods. Were you not chasing wildlife today, you could embark on one of the 'Farm Gate and Cellar Door' trails, which take in honeys, cheeses, yoghurts, jams and olive oils. Not forgetting wine, of course: the island's 200 hectares of vineyards date back to 1837.

But today it's nature that's on your menu. Kangaroo Island's rich wildlife reflects its isolated location, which leaves it beyond the reach of the invasive foxes and rabbits that have depleted wildlife on the mainland. As you work your way across Flinders

Chase National Park you encounter diminutive Tamar Wallabies resting in the shade and an impressive Rosenberg's Goanna basking on the verge, both species now endangered elsewhere in South Australia. Meanwhile, many local species have evolved here: those kangaroos you saw earlier are unique sub-species of the western grey kangaroo, found only on Kangaroo Island. And a raucous party of Glossy Black-Cockatoos you spy winging into a Causarina Grove belong to a rare endemic subspecies also found nowhere else.

Half the excitement of any island is, of course, the sea that surrounds it, and Kangaroo Island is no exception. Sheltering beneath the impressive natural sculptures of Remarkable Rocks, you watch breakers pound the granite coastline while thousands of short-tailed shearwaters commute past offshore. In season, Southern Right Whales cavort in these waters. Today, your marine mammal action comes further east at Seal Bay, where lumbering Australian Sea-lions pursue their territorial disputes while their doe-eyed pups sprawl beside the boardwalk. Meanwhile Hooded Plovers tend their nest at the top of the beach while Cape Barren Geese fly honking along the shoreline.

Afternoon takes you back east across the island towards the capital Kingscote. The mosaic of habitats, from sand-dunes to mallee scrub, brings ever more wildlife as you go – from a munching koala up a gum tree, baby on board like a mini backpack, to flotillas of Black Swans and Australian Pelicans on the wetlands of American River.

The evening could bring yet more wildlife delights – such as little penguins waddling ashore to their burrows. But after a day on the road, with nothing more than a hearty packed lunch to sustain you, it's time to sample some of that famous local produce. At a waterfront restaurant, you tuck into a feast of the island's celebrated seafood, fresh from the ocean that laps just beyond your table. Your plates comes piled high with oysters, prawns, whiting and marron, a prized local freshwater crayfish. And to wash it down? With 18 home-grown labels, you have no trouble finding a bottle that takes your fancy.

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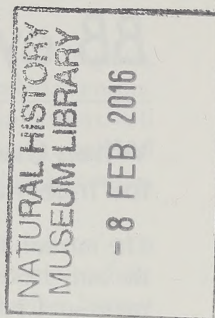
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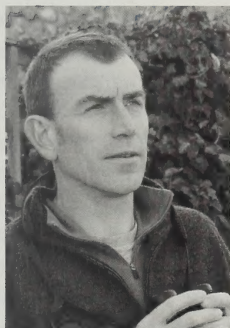


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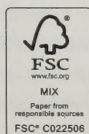
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Over the past two or three years the Hen Harrier has become something of an icon for conservation-minded birders, as it battles to survive as a breeding bird in Britain's uplands, at least anywhere in the vicinity of grouse shooting. The long-awaited Hen Harrier Action Plan was finally published in mid January, and you can read more about that on page 73. The first paper in this issue documents a long-term study of Hen Harriers in one part of Scotland where high-quality data, painstakingly amassed over a long period, show very clearly the degree to which the species is struggling, and what its population might be like in the absence of illegal persecution. As a result of 'Hen Harrier Day' and other initiatives, the plight of the Hen Harrier has now been brought to a wide audience. Mark Avery has been vociferous on the subject and, at the time of writing, his petition

for a ban on driven grouse shooting has almost 33,000 signatures. Interestingly, a lot of those signatures come from the West Yorkshire constituency that includes Hebden Bridge. This town has suffered yet more misery in the horrendous weather of winter 2015/16, to follow other episodes of flooding in the last decade or so – since more intensive (grouse-related) management of the uplands above the town began. Flooding is a complex issue and there are many contributory factors, which vary significantly in their importance from place to place; there is no single smoking gun. But in some areas it does appear that grouse-moor management (both drainage and heather burning promote run-off) is part of the problem.

Roger Riddington



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❖ interpret scientific research on birds in an easily accessible way.



## When the fox preaches, take care of your geese: the urgent need for international collaboration to manage migratory geese

The mission for a goose conservationist in the early 1950s was clear. Economic development and post-war reconstruction was leading to widespread loss and degradation of wetlands across Europe. Poorly restricted (or even unrestricted) hunting – often commercially motivated – was adversely affecting populations. The few protected areas that existed were greatly limited in extent and distribution, and typically restricted to roost areas only. At that time, there were no effective international frameworks within which to address these issues other than at a national scale, while the overall knowledge of numbers and trends was poor. In 1960, population estimates made by Hugh Boyd suggested that there were 100,000 individuals from ten populations of seven species in Britain.

The conservation agenda for the following decades, led by such pioneers as Luc Hoffman, Peter Scott, Hugh Boyd, Geoffrey Matthews and others, set out to tackle these issues progressively, leading to the development of the Ramsar Convention on wetlands in 1971, the EU Birds Directive and Convention on Migratory Species in 1979, and ultimately the Agreement on the conservation of African-Eurasian migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) in 1995. Regulation of hunting was much improved, through a new generation of national legislation and by the hunters themselves. Coherent networks of wildfowl refuges and national protected areas were established, including the creation of no-shooting refuges within larger sites. The progressive development of national waterbird monitoring, stimulated by IWRB/Wetland International's International Waterbird Census, led to increasingly improved population trends and estimates. Targeted conservation actions pulled populations back towards favourable conservation status. Things were most certainly on the up.

In parallel with these developments, agriculture was becoming ever more intensive, with widespread homogenised landscapes

stimulated by technological change and the EU's Common Agricultural Policy. Although St Werburgh was banishing geese from English fields in the seventh century, until very recently agriculture has never served up such rich monocultures of goose food as is currently the case in Europe. The geese feeding on single-species stands of grass and arable crops, waste roots, and unharvested and spilled cereal grains (all selectively bred for their food quality) can sustain unimaginably high food intake rates compared with those possible when foraging on saltmarshes or low-intensity pastures, where birds are constrained to search among diverse swards for the most nutritionally rewarding grass blades. Little wonder that, in response, geese have progressively abandoned their natural habitats to exploit this larder of superabundance and, when scared away, show little desire to abandon nutritionally rich agricultural fields for the natural and semi-natural habitats that were formerly their exclusive foraging habitats.

The implications for geese have been profound. In Britain, in the last few years, we estimate that Boyd's ten populations of seven goose species now comprise well over one million individuals. Of course, this represents a major conservation success story and one for which the pioneer generations of conservationists can be rightly proud.

Yet there are 'uncomfortable truths' now emerging from this achievement. The impact of geese on agriculture represents a significant and increasing economic cost – in 2009, at least £1.6 million was paid in various forms of agricultural subsidy via seven goose schemes in Scotland to accommodate geese, while outside areas covered by these schemes there were considerable additional direct losses to farm incomes. Costs have only gone up since then. Elsewhere in Europe 'compensation' scheme payments are much greater. Burgeoning numbers of both migratory and resident geese near major airports, such as Schiphol in the Netherlands and Copenhagen



in Denmark, have been the cause of increased air-strike rates and heighten the risk of catastrophic collisions – highlighted by the downing of US Airways Flight 1549 into the Hudson River by Canada Geese *Branta canadensis* in January 2009.

The development of resident goose populations from a variety of sources and the establishment of temperate breeding colonies of Arctic-nesting species such as the Barnacle Goose *B. leucopsis* are increasingly blurring our understanding of what constitutes ‘natural’ breeding distributions. Resightings of marked birds clearly demonstrate that individual geese can, and do, switch between such ‘populations’ despite the contrasting ecological constraints operating in either situation. A further consequence is the loss of cultural significance as geese increasingly are seen by some as ‘junk birds’: the perceived difference between a Barnacle Goose nesting far up on its traditional Russian tundra habitats and one gobbling bread in an urban park is considerable.

Increasing goose populations have impacts on not just human interests. The profound ecological changes to some North American Arctic ecosystems caused by super-abundant Lesser Snow Geese *Anser caerulescens caerulescens* in recent decades are well documented. Access to Eurasian breeding areas is much more limited, yet there is growing awareness that similar significant ecological impacts are now also occurring on some Palearctic tundra areas. Impacts are also apparent in other wetland ecosystems arising from increasing goose densities, further exacerbated by the increasing overlap of different populations.

For those geese that have made the transition to exploit food in agricultural landscapes, there are now almost unlimited food resources with which to sustain the future growth of populations. Most show little or no signs of density dependence at the overall population level and doubling times for some populations are short and becoming shorter.

The hard truth for goose conservationists is that the current laissez-faire approach to these increasing populations is becoming ever more difficult to justify – ecologically, economically and politically. With the increasing clamour from those parts of

society adversely affected by their impacts, there is a very real risk that continued uncontrolled growth of goose populations will trigger irrational and spontaneous political responses – to the detriment of wider conservation objectives.

AEWA recognises ‘adaptive harvest’ as a fundamental management principle, and the adoption of the first fully adaptive harvest management plan for Svalbard-nesting Pink-footed Geese *A. brachyrhynchus* by Contracting Parties in 2012 has provided a valuable model for dealing with other goose populations. Prior to that international plan, unregulated shooting in one Range State undermined the conservation actions of others, and indeed jeopardised the long-term conservation status of the population. In agreeing to sustain this population at somewhere between 50,000 and 70,000 individuals, the plan now attempts to balance the interests of multiple stakeholders in the relevant Range States.

Because of the success of conservation actions for many of the populations, and especially because of the success of the geese themselves at adapting to contemporary farmland landscapes, we now have many more geese in Europe than at any other time in living memory. But the conflict that their abundance is now creating with some sectors of society requires novel, coordinated and wide-scale approaches. There is increasing need for conservation bodies to develop their thinking to embrace desirable/sustainable population levels, and the management required to adapt populations to these. This will not be easy. After many years of protection, many will find it difficult to accept that population regulation of *any* kind is necessary. But the increasing risks of air strikes associated with goose population growth are undeniable, and fatal consequences from such accidents are perhaps inevitable.

Rather than the chaos of uncoordinated and unilateral control without limit, the challenge is to integrate the resolution of multiple conflicts into flyway management plans to tackle these issues through structured decision-making frameworks. Goose populations move between many countries during their annual cycles and belong to no single jurisdiction, so such frameworks will also



ensure that interventions across Range States are coordinated to maintain favourable conservation status.

This is not new ground in wildlife management: ungulate populations have long been subject to such adaptive approaches to limit undesirable impacts. The difference is that actions related to long-distance migratory waterfowl necessitate international cooperation, monitoring and coordination. It is absolutely essential that such an adaptive approach is enshrined within existing legal frameworks so that management can respond in a sensitive and evidence-based manner to demographic changes. This does not mean throwing away the very tools that have been responsible for our conservation successes; indeed it will be fundamental to retain these conservation instruments as a critical safety net to safeguard minimum population levels. These are legal requirements of AEWA and the EU Birds Directive, which will ensure the healthy survival of such populations should a future emerge that is different from that anticipated.

In October 2015, at a conference convened by the Danish Nature Agency, Danish Ministry of Environment and Food, and Aarhus University, delegates from ten northern-hemisphere countries reviewed the way in which those countries currently attempt to resolve these conflicts, both nationally and locally. The conference also attempted to assess the various levels of satisfaction across stakeholder groups with management outcomes. What was evident was that internationally coordinated management plans are essential for the effective delivery of conflict resolution at flyway, national, regional and local scales. It is of critical importance that such plans should have internationally agreed objectives and transparent governance. Integrated monitoring and timely feedback to decision-makers is also an essential element of international plans, in order to facilitate changes to management actions as necessary.

As a result of representations from this conference, the recent 6th Meeting of the Parties gave the AEWA Secretariat the mandate to establish a multispecies goose

management platform to address the sustainable use of goose populations and provide for the resolution of human–goose conflicts. Such an initiative provides a powerful framework to address many of the challenges we now face regarding goose conservation management, as well as potential mechanisms for funding work to find specific solutions for particular populations, whether of increasing numbers or declining abundance.

We have come a long way in restoring goose populations since the 1950s. For some populations with unfavourable status (such as the Greenland White-fronted Goose *A. albifrons flavirostris* and Taiga Bean Goose *A. fabalis fabalis*), we still have far to go and need to redouble efforts to restore favourable conservation status. The annual migrations of geese from our shores to their distant Arctic breeding grounds are no less inspiring or spiritually uplifting now than they were in the 1950s, or indeed long before. However, abundant goose populations are now affecting other elements of biodiversity as well as presenting considerable challenges to society through their impact on livelihoods, the economy, ecosystem services and threats to human life. We cannot afford to let others decide unilaterally about the future trajectories of these populations. Yet if we are to avoid this, all relevant parties must be involved in discussions to move towards collective agreement on management objectives and implementing actions for different goose populations. It is also crucial that the necessary safeguards are in place within these frameworks to avoid undesirable outcomes. Most fundamentally, there will need to be trust and a sense of common purpose if the process is to succeed – and that will mean listening to, understanding and respecting the viewpoints of others as well as taking collective responsibility for finding solutions. As a community we have a great deal more to learn if we are going to be effective in guiding the future development and perpetuation of these inspiring and magical birds.

*David Stroud, Jesper Madsen and Tony Fox*

David Stroud is a senior ornithologist with JNCC, Jesper Madsen is Professor of Wildlife Ecology at Aarhus University and Tony Fox is Professor of Waterbird Ecology at Aarhus University. All three have worked with several species of geese, in many parts of the world.



# News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

## Hen Harrier action plan published

The Government has finally published its action plan to increase the English Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* population. And yes, controversial proposals for 'brood management' (removing young harriers from nests on grouse moors) are in there – and so are plans to reintroduce Hen Harriers to the south of England. A five-year trial of brood management has been costed at £875,000 and the reintroduction programme at £515,000.

Here's the Defra press release in full:

'Plans to help revive the Hen Harrier, one of England's most iconic birds, have been published as part of the Government's ongoing commitment to preserve and enhance our nation's natural environment. As a bird of prey, Hen Harriers make an important contribution to our intricate ecosystem – and are a well-loved feature of our skyline, but in recent years their numbers have dropped.

'The Hen Harrier Action Plan will for the first time coordinate action already taken by conservation groups, landowners and wildlife crime officers across the country to ensure a consistent and strategic approach. The plan will also encourage groups to share best practice to help reverse the decline of these precious birds.

'Environment Minister Rory Stewart said: "This new plan will transform the fate of one of our most magnificent birds. We are working closely with conservation organisations and landowners and with their help, this plan will help Hen Harriers flourish once more while co-existing with a thriving rural economy. Our wildlife is a crucial part of our national identity. That's why we care deeply about protecting this vital species for future generations to come."

'Natural England's Director of Terrestrial Biodiversity, Rob Cooke, said: "We welcome the publication of the Hen Harrier Action Plan, which sets out an important set of actions to help improve the conservation status of Hen Harriers in England. Natural England is firmly committed to this shared plan and has been asked by Defra to lead on the implementation of some of the actions set out in it. We are looking forward to working with a range of organisations and land managers to help secure a future for the Hen Harrier as a breeding bird in England."

'The plan was developed by Defra in conjunction with the RSPB, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, Moorland Association, National Gamekeepers' Organisation and National Parks

UK. Natural England will lead on a six-point plan to: monitor Hen Harrier numbers in England and the UK via satellite tagging and tracking; share best practice with land managers and gamekeepers, encouraging the provision of food for birds of prey; work closely with the Raptor Persecution Priority Delivery Group (RPPDG) to analyse intelligence on persecution and deliver more effective enforcement and deterrence measures; monitor and protect nests and winter roosts from disturbance and destruction; work with landowners to reintroduce Hen Harriers to suitable areas in the south of England; scope out feasibility for trialling brood management.

'Some of these actions, like monitoring and sharing best practice, are already underway at known nesting sites, such as in the Forest of Bowland, in Lancashire. Other actions, such as trialling brood management, will be looked into by Natural England, which will work closely with partners to determine criteria for a field trial. This countrywide action has already seen nest figures increase last year, from four in 2014 to six in 2015.

'The plans will also help deliver on a key manifesto commitment for this government to conserve and enhance the environment as part of a comprehensive, long-term vision to protect the country's natural heritage. Defra will publish a detailed 25-year plan for action on the environment later in the year.'

The full Action Plan, drawn up by the 'Uplands Stakeholder Forum, Hen Harrier Sub-group' can be read here: <http://bit.ly/1SPW917> Its success criteria are that: 'The Hen Harrier has a self-sustaining and well-dispersed breeding population in England across a range of habitats, including a viable population present in the Special Protected Areas designated for Hen Harrier' and 'The harrier population co-exists with local business interests and its presence contributes to a thriving rural economy.' Readers may be understandably uneasy with the second of those...

One final thought: the Government is prepared to spend c. £1.4 m on Hen Harrier brood management and reintroduction trials while the National Wildlife Crime Unit, which costs just £400,000 per year, faces closure at the end of next month. But then, we won't need the NWCU once all those troublesome Hen Harriers from the north of England have been translocated to the grouse moor-free areas of the south, will we?



## RSPB Scotland documents 20 years of raptor killing

RSPB Scotland has published a detailed 20-year review of the illegal killing of birds of prey in Scotland, which confirms that 779 protected raptors were killed illegally between 1994 and 2014. In total, 468 birds of prey were poisoned, 173 were shot and 76 were caught in illegal traps. There were also seven attempted shootings. The figures include 104 Red Kites *Milvus milvus*, 37 Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos*, 30 Hen Harriers, 16 Northern Goshawks *Accipiter gentilis* and 10 White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla*.

The report deals only with incidents that have been confirmed as involving criminal activity, either by post-mortem examination at a government laboratory or by reliable witnesses. The number of birds actually killed will therefore be much higher.

In a further 171 incidents, poison baits and/or non-bird of prey victims of poisoning were found, including 14 domestic cats and 14 dogs. There were also an additional 134 incidents where, although no victim was recovered, clear attempts had been made to target raptors – through the use of illegal traps for example.

RSPB Scotland's review shows that over the past 20 years a significant majority of cases take place in areas associated with gamebird shooting, and in particular within upland areas managed intensively for driven grouse shooting. It is also noted, however, that in recent years there have been some significant and welcome reductions in the number of cases reported

from lowland areas of Scotland.

Director of RSPB Scotland, Stuart Housden, said: 'We recognise that many landowners and their staff have helped with positive conservation efforts for birds of prey, particularly with reintroduction programmes for White-tailed Eagles and Red Kites, and that the majority operate legitimate shooting businesses. But there are still far too many who do not act responsibly, and there will be no improvement in the conservation status of raptors until all land management is carried out wholly within the law.'

There is now well-documented scientific evidence of the impact of illegal human killing on Scotland's Golden Eagle, Hen Harrier, Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*, and reintroduced Red Kite populations. The last national Hen Harrier survey, for example, showed the population had declined by 22% in Scotland between 2004 and 2010. The JNCC Hen Harrier Framework 2011 concluded that illegal killing was having a significant impact on this species, particularly on land managed for driven grouse shooting in the southern uplands and eastern Highlands.

Stuart Housden continued: 'Scotland's shooting industry, in contrast to [that of] the rest of Europe, has "light touch" regulation and little public accountability. Self-policing has been given more than a fair chance and numerous public warnings, from ministers aimed at upland sporting managers, have not been heeded. It is long overdue that sporting

management should be licensed, conditional on compliance with wildlife protection laws. We encourage the Scottish Government to initiate the planned review of gamebird licensing systems in other similar countries as soon as possible so we can learn and adopt best practice to ensure a sustainable future for sports shooting.'

You can read the full report here: [www.rspb.org.uk/Images/illegal-killing\\_tcm9-411686.pdf](http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/illegal-killing_tcm9-411686.pdf)



Des Ong/FLPA

31. White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, Skye, Highland, September 2008.

## New county bird recorders

Co. Durham Derek Charlton, e-mail [charlton115@btinternet.com](mailto:charlton115@btinternet.com) (with Chris Bell – tel. (01325) 358545, e-mail [bellchris76@gmail.com](mailto:bellchris76@gmail.com) – taking on responsibilities for rarities and scarce migrants).



## What happens to my bird books when I'm gone?

This question was posed by Chris Spooner last month (*Brit. Birds* 109: 6) as he contemplates a suitable destination for his treasured bird book collection when he ultimately heads off to that big bird reserve in the sky. Chris lamented that, with the demise of public libraries and the lack of storage space that birding charities have, his bequeathed/donated collection would be sold off piecemeal rather than find a home where it could be cherished in its entirety.

However, *BB* subscriber and book dealer John Lucas from the Isle of Wight has some encouragement for those of us who are anxious about our book collection's final destination. He says: 'As a dealer specialising in second-hand and antiquarian maritime books, I often find myself sorting out the collections of a deceased collector. Invariably, whoever is responsible for their disposal is relieved to find somebody with specialist knowledge who values the books, who appreciates the quality of the collection and who has a means of getting them back into circulation to similar collectors.'

'On some occasions the money I pay goes straight to a nominated charity but that depends on the wishes of the owner. There are still collectors setting out to build up collections as loved and valued as the collections which are now being dispersed on the death of their owners. Books are still being collected, as they always have been. Yes there are apps and marvellous online resources for the travelling ornithologist, but I still find a strong demand for good-quality books of all ages.'

'As the owner of a much-treasured collection of bird books myself, one aspect of my collection I especially value is the number of books that I own which have either belonged to other birders or have been signed by them. In particular, the bookplates of previous owners give me a whole new added interest in the book. In other cases the previous owner may be unknown but their well-

drawn bookplate of a bird indicates the value they attached to the book and adds to the pleasure given by that book. I find a similar reaction from my customers with regard to maritime books. My advice to anyone who wanted to give their collection of books a permanence would be to design a personal bookplate (or get somebody else to do it) and then, wherever the books end up, they will always be identified with that collection.'

Moss Taylor also wrote in, to say: 'In retrospect, I should have included my concerns about my library of bird and natural history books in my contribution to *BB* eye – *Brit. Birds* 108: 186–187. I also have a large collection (1,500+) of bird and natural history books that I have accumulated over the last 60 years, and to which for some obscure reason I am still adding to!

'The late David Musson decided a few years ago to sell his extensive ornithological library through a local auction house, and clearly enjoyed watching as the bids came in, knowing that all the money (less commission) would be going to his chosen charity, which I believe was the BTO.'

'Like Chris Spooner, I would be reluctant to bequeath my books, say to the BTO, in the knowledge that only a small minority would find their way into the BTO library and that the majority would be sold on. However, I'm delighted to say that I have been able to find a grateful recipient: Gresham's School in Holt, and my books are destined to be kept as a reference library in the Biology Department. Since my three sons attended the school, I feel that I owe the school a debt of gratitude, and Gresham's has a long history of producing some outstanding ornithologists, including Prof. M. F. M. (Maury) Meiklejohn, Dr David Lack, R. P. (Dick) Bagnell-Oakeley and David Hunt (of Scilly fame). Perhaps my books will one day help to stimulate some well-known ornithologists of the future...'

## Now that's a BIG Year List!

British birders call it a Year List – the number of species logged in a calendar-year – whereas North Americans call it a Big Year. And one American birder had a very Big Year indeed in 2015. When Noah Strycker ticked off Silver-breasted Broadbill *Serilophus lunatus* in India on 31st December after a year of intensive world birding, it was species number 6,042 for his 2015 year list!

Noah's *Birding Without Borders* project is a new world record and eclipses the previous total of 4,341 set by British couple Ruth Miller and Alan Davies on *The Biggest Twitch* in 2008 (see the book

review in *BB* at <http://bit.ly/1SkbllK>).

More environmentally conscious readers of that book – and Noah Strycker's blog – will be acutely aware that a Big Year comes with a big carbon footprint. Noah justified it on his blog like this: 'It sounds like a lot of flying, but a year is a long time to trace one methodical circuit of the globe. Contrasted with the quick overseas vacations taken by many birders, the environmental impact of this project seems less extreme – or at least more efficient. Travelling with a purpose carries other benefits, too; in my view, if everyone



could visit just one other country, the world would become more humane. Still, I know I will be responsible for burning a lot of fuel in 2015, so I have joined a carbon offset programme. It's not a perfect system, but in theory my net carbon footprint during this trip will be zero.'

You can read Noah's blog on his Big Year here:

[www.audubon.org/features/birding-without-borders](http://www.audubon.org/features/birding-without-borders)

Dutch birder Arjan Dwarshuis is already hoping to beat Noah's total during another global birding odyssey in 2016. He's fundraising for BirdLife's *Preventing Extinctions* programme: <http://arjandwarshuis.com/#biggestyear>

## Northern Harrier is 599th British bird

The milestone of 600 species on the British List inches ever closer. The BOU Records Committee, currently the official keepers of the List, has accepted that the North American Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius* is a distinct species separate from Hen Harrier *C. cyaneus* and added it

to Category A of the British List with the first accepted record being the long-staying bird on Scilly in 1982/83 (described in *Brit. Birds* 101: 394–407). There have been several recent records of Northern Harrier, including a fine male on North Ronaldsay, Orkney, in autumn 2015 (plate 32).

Another addition to the British List is 'Thayer's Gull', which BOU RC treats as a subspecies of Iceland Gull, *Larus glaucoides thayeri*, although many birders/listers beg to differ. The first accepted record of Thayer's Gull was an adult photographed at Pitsea landfill site in Essex in November 2010 and a subsequent juvenile in Lincolnshire in April 2012 is also cited (accounts of these first records will appear in *BB* later this year). The 45th report of the BOU RC can be found at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ibi.12320/pdf>



George Gay

**32.** Male Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius*, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, October 2015.

## BPY 40

A reminder that the 40th *British Birds* Bird Photograph of the Year competition is open for entries. Entry is free and the top prize is £1,000. Full details on our website: [www.britishbirds.co.uk/about/bird-photograph-of-the-year](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk/about/bird-photograph-of-the-year)

## Corrections

Norfolk Bird Report editor Andy Stoddart has pointed out that there were no records of 'Black Brant' *Branta bernicla nigricans* at Holkham in 2013, and that the bird in plate 7 of the January issue is considered to be an intergrade. Also in the

January issue, in the N&c item about Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla* (p. 7), the correct statistic is that there are now more Kittiwakes nesting on the Tyne than on Foula and Noss (not Hermaness) combined.

**For extended versions of many of the stories featured here, and much more, visit our website [www.britishbirds.co.uk](http://www.britishbirds.co.uk)**



# The past, current and potential status of breeding Hen Harriers in North-east Scotland

Graham Rebecca, Brian Cosnette, Jim Craib,  
Alistair Duncan, Brian Etheridge, Ian Francis,  
Jon Hardey, Alastair Pout and Logan Steele

**Abstract** The Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* recolonised North-east Scotland in the 1940s and expanded its population and range into the 1990s. Coordinated survey and monitoring during 1980–2014, together with supplementary records, identified 118 discrete breeding areas. The vast majority were on moorland managed for Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus* sport shooting. Peak numbers of at least 28 breeding pairs in the 1990s declined steadily to just three pairs in 2010–12, five in 2013 and one in 2014. Illegal persecution and grouse-management practices are believed to be the main causes of that decline, which occurred despite ample suitable habitat and prey. Two raptor recovery projects were not successful in reversing the decline, and proposed designation of the best site as a Special Protection Area for Hen Harriers stalled. If current habitat management continues, and prey availability is maintained, the area has the potential to hold around 100 breeding pairs in the absence of persecution. Aspects of Hen Harrier ecology led to conflicts with grouse-shooting interests and a greatly constrained harrier population. This is one of the most controversial conservation issues in the UK, and we suggest that Scottish Natural Heritage and Police Scotland are best placed to lead on overseeing a recovery plan for North-east Scotland. A number of options to aid any potential recovery are also suggested.

## Introduction

The Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*, Red-listed in the recent Birds of Conservation Concern review (Eaton *et al.* 2015), is also listed on Annex 1 of the EU Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (2009/147/EC), which requires special measures to be taken to ensure its conservation. A common and widespread breeding bird in the UK in the early 1800s, it had been virtually exterminated from mainland Britain by 1900

(Watson 1977; Holloway 1996). This was largely due to human interference to preserve poultry and game, although agricultural intensification and drainage almost certainly reduced potential breeding habitat (Watson 1977; Stoate 1995). A recovery began during the 1940s, when many gamekeepers were absent during the Second World War and the recently established Forestry Commission provided much secure nesting habitat in the form of young conifer plantations (Watson





Graham Rebecca

33. Female Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* at nest with chicks, approximately 17–18 days old, lower Deeside, North-east Scotland, June 1982.

1977; Avery & Leslie 1990).

An early study into the effects of the

of the Hen Harrier, in relation to current land management and wildlife laws.

expanding Hen Harrier population on Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus* in one area of lower Deeside found that grouse numbers in late summer were reduced by an estimated 7.4% in areas frequented by harriers (Picozzi 1978; fig. 1). Three national surveys produced breeding-population estimates for the UK and Isle of Man of 570 pairs in 1998, 806 in 2004 and 662 in 2010 (Sim et al. 2001, 2007; Hayhow et al. 2013). These highlighted the strong association between harriers and upland moorland and also the reduced populations in areas intensively managed for driven grouse shooting<sup>1</sup>.

In this paper, we summarise the recent background to the harrier–grouse conservation conflict, review the history of Hen Harrier recolonisation of North-east Scotland and describe its recent breeding status and distribution following extensive survey and monitoring during 1980–2014. We also consider the future prospects

<sup>1</sup> Driven grouse shooting (where ‘beaters’ flush grouse towards shooters concealed in butts) and Hen Harrier hunting behaviour (when many grouse and their chicks might be taken) are considered incompatible by most grouse-moor owners, managers and tenants. Estimated grouse densities of at least 60 birds per km<sup>2</sup> are required to justify driven shoots (and, exceptionally, can reach unnaturally high densities of up to 300 birds per km<sup>2</sup>; Hudson 1992). At lower densities, ‘walking-up’ and shooting over pointer dogs can be a compromise hunting method that ensures clients engage with the sport, owners get some financial return and grouse occur at near-natural levels. Such less-intensive grouse shooting probably reduces the likelihood of spreading disease (Davies 2005). The main characteristics of managed grouse moors include: 1) rotational burning of heather *Calluna/Erica* in strips or patches, to create a mixture of young plants for food and older heather for refuge and nesting; 2) lines of evenly spaced shooting butts; 3) a myriad of vehicle tracks; and 4) the suppression of native woodland, mostly Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* or birch *Betula*, by a combination of burning, grazing and felling (Watson & Miller 1976; Watson & Moss 2008; plates 36–38).



## Recent background to the conflict between harriers and grouse

## BOX 1

Following concerns about the potential impact of birds of prey on Red Grouse, a Joint Raptor Study (JRS) was set up in 1992 as a collaboration between the Game Conservancy Trust, Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), Natural Environmental Research Council, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and six Scottish grouse-moor estates. The main aim was to provide an assessment of the impact of raptors on the numbers of Red Grouse shot over a five-year period. This type of collaboration had not been attempted previously and it was hoped that solutions to reduce conflict between raptors and grouse-shooting interests could be identified. However, following publication of the JRS report (Redpath & Thirgood 1997) views remained polarised based on different interpretations of the key results (e.g. Hughes *et al.* 1998, Potts 1998a). One possible solution was supplementary feeding, though this has not so far been widely adopted by grouse-moor managers. [Supplementary or diversionary feeding involves the daily provision of dead food (e.g. rats or day-old poultry chicks) on prominent perches near Hen Harrier nests (Moorland Working Group 1999; plate 42). Research has shown that this can significantly reduce the number of grouse chicks taken to nests, but did not result in a net increase in adult (shootable) grouse in the autumn (Redpath *et al.* 2001). In addition, potential predators of grouse eggs or chicks such as corvids and large gulls could not be excluded from utilising the supplementary food. Consequently, there have not been sufficient further trials to fully evaluate this procedure.]

Although the debate essentially revolves around economics and wildlife law, estate owners, managers and game organisations also contend that grouse-moor management can be good for biodiversity in general, as well as benefiting local communities (e.g. Thirgood *et al.* 2000a, Robertson *et al.* 2001, Tharme *et al.* 2001, Baines *et al.* 2008). In contrast, conservationists highlight the impacts of illegal killing of raptors (e.g. Whitfield *et al.* 2004, 2007, Amar *et al.* 2011, Fielding *et al.* 2011; plate 34). They also point out that other rural businesses, such as ecotourism, can be beneficial to local economies (e.g. Lister-Kaye 2001, Dickie *et al.* 2006, Molloy 2011). Further collaboration in 2005–07, now also including Natural England, led to a new, £3 million, ten-year study at the main JRS site in south Scotland ([www.langholmproject.com](http://www.langholmproject.com)). The overall aim of this project was to re-establish Langholm Moor as an economically viable grouse moor at the same time as achieving the site's SPA<sup>1</sup> criteria (including supporting >1% of the current UK Hen Harrier breeding population).

Subsequently, the JRS authors initiated a 'forum dialogue' through the British Ecological Society (Thirgood & Redpath 2008) leading to responses from the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and RSPB. While many of the previous stances and much of the previous reasoning were still evident, there was consensus on the impact that harriers can have on grouse, impact that some game preservers are having on harriers, and that supplementary feeding should be trialled more widely (Sotherton *et al.* 2009; Thompson *et al.* 2009). Redpath *et al.* (2010) questioned whether harrier conservation and grouse-moor management could be reconciled, highlighting the fact that only nine successful harrier nests were located on driven grouse-moors in the UK in 2008 when almost 500 were to be expected. They concluded that for any progress to be possible, continued dialogue was essential, and that further information was required on the legality, feasibility, acceptability and costs of potential solutions. However, despite discussions in various voluntary and government-led forums, the impasse remains.

<sup>1</sup> Special Protection Areas (SPAs, for birds) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC, for flora and other fauna) together form the basis of *Natura 2000*, a network of existing Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designed to conserve natural habitats, plants and animals which are rare, endangered or vulnerable in the European Community (Stroud 2002).



Brian Etheridge



34. The release of a male Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* caught in a trap on the Moy estate, Highland, May 2010. Following an investigation, a gamekeeper was convicted and fined £1,500 for the possession of a dead Red Kite *Milvus milvus*. He was also in possession of four BTO rings previously fitted to Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* in Scotland, although it could not be proven that he actually killed them; see *Legal Eagle* (the RSPB investigations newsletter) 65: 3, 2011.

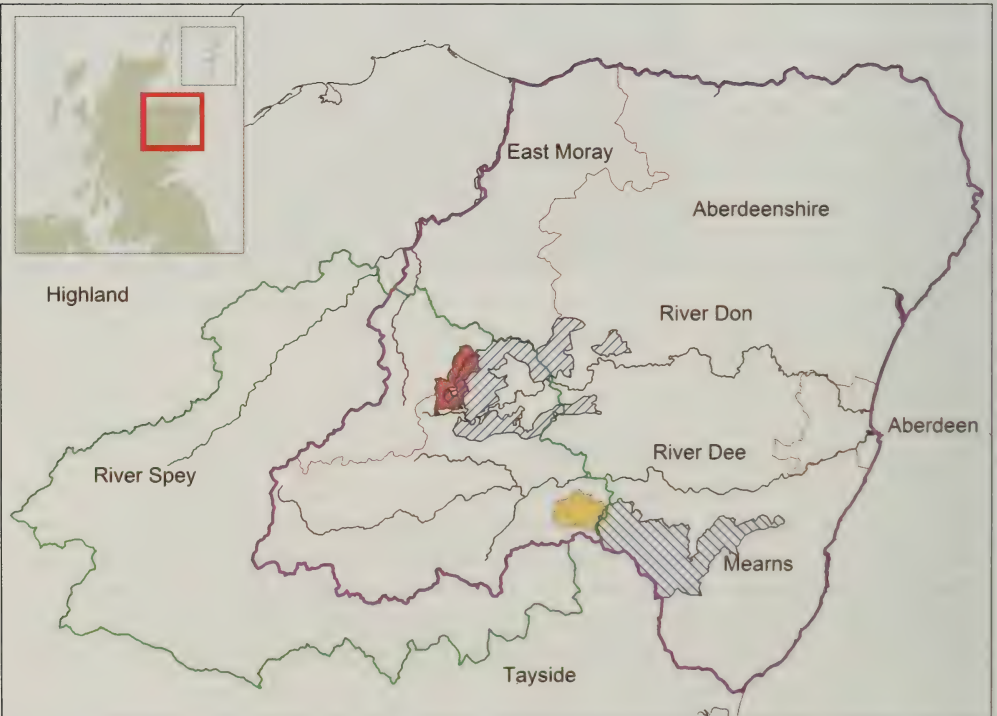


Fig. 1. Map of the North-east Scotland Raptor Study Group monitoring area (Aberdeenshire, East Moray and Aberdeen within the purple boundary) including the lower Deeside (hatched with blue backslash, 217 km<sup>2</sup>) and upper Donside (hatched with blue forward slash, 228 km<sup>2</sup>) raptor study areas, Glen Tanar SPA (pale orange, 42 km<sup>2</sup>) and Ladder Hills SSSI and former potential SPA (dark orange, 44 km<sup>2</sup>). The green border shows the Cairngorms National Park boundary in 2014.

## Hen Harrier breeding habitat in the UK and in North-east Scotland

In the UK, breeding Hen Harriers utilise open ground for hunting and nesting, including moorland, heaths, bogs, low scrub, sand dunes, young conifer plantations and second-rotation conifer forest scrub/brash (Watson 1977; Petty & Anderson 1986; Arroyo *et al.* 2008; plates 36 & 37). Nests are usually situated on the ground in deep heather, or in a mix of young conifers and heather (Redpath *et al.* 1998; Madders 2000; plates 33 & 39). The main hunting and nesting habitats are well represented in North-east Scotland, with approximately 1,870 km<sup>2</sup> of heather moorland, 650 km<sup>2</sup> of rough grassland and 110 km<sup>2</sup> of deep peat-bog (Francis & Cook 2011). Despite this abundance of potential breeding habitat, there is little historical evidence of breeding occupancy for the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, which reflects the national status for that period (Sim 1903; Watson 1977; Nethersole-Thompson & Watson 1981; Watson & Francis 2012).

## Study area and methods

The study area covers the monitoring zone of

the North-east Scotland Raptor Study Group (NESRSG, fig. 1).

## Survey coverage

From the 1940s to 1979, breeding-season records of Hen Harriers were collated from published studies, gamekeepers, moorland ecologists and our own observations. Between 1980 and 2014, breeding Hen Harriers, Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* and Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus* were monitored in a 217 km<sup>2</sup> area on Deeside that had been initially established to study the breeding ecology of Merlins *F. columbarius* (Rebecca 2006). In 1981, the NESRSG was formed and, in 1986 a second, similar raptor study area was established on Donside, covering 228 km<sup>2</sup> (Rebecca & Cosnette 2003; fig. 1). Annual coverage was thorough in these areas and the vast majority of Hen Harrier breeding attempts were believed to have been recorded.

In 1987, the RSPB established a presence in Aberdeen, at a time when moorland species were regarded as a top priority. Since then, at least one person has been employed annually to census moorland raptors in North-east Scotland. In addition to work for Scottish/UK



Philip Newman/RSPB images

**35.** Male Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* on Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris*, lower Deeside, North-east Scotland, June 1997. This male and his mate (plate 39) were using a regenerating pine-wood breeding area.



Ian Francis



**36.** The striking patterns of mixed-age Heather *Calluna vulgaris* following burning, as part of management to encourage Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus*, mid Deeside, North-east Scotland, February 2006.

surveys (see below), studies of Hen Harrier productivity, dispersal and survival were undertaken in 1988–95 (Etheridge *et al.* 1997). During national surveys of a wide range of other moorland priority species, field surveyors were asked to report all harrier sightings to us for follow-up. In addition, we utilised information from moorland bird surveys carried out by Nature Conservancy Council (NCC), JNCC and RSPB (Shepherd *et al.* 1988; Brown & Shepherd 1990, 1991; Francis *et al.* 1999; Sim *et al.* 2005; Francis 2008); Hen Harrier monitoring at a JRS site in North-east Scotland; and annual reports

for the Glen Tanar Hen Harrier SPA and Ladder Hills SSSI/pSPA (proposed SPA) (e.g. Sim 1999, Hardey & Craib 2001, Hardey *et al.* 2002–03, Hardey 2006, Espie 2008; fig. 1). Further information was collated from two partnership initiatives developed in an effort to improve raptor breeding success in North-east Scotland: Operation Falcon in 1999–2002 (SNH 2003) and Raptor Watch in 2006–11 (Craib 2006–12). We also used information collected for the second North-east Scotland breeding bird atlas (Francis & Cook 2011), for *Bird Atlas 2007–11* (Balmer *et al.* 2013) and from local bird reports and estates staff.

Paul Chapman



**37.** Typical hunting and breeding habitat of Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus* in North-east Scotland, August 2007. This glen, in lower Deeside, held 3–4 pairs of breeding harriers in the 1990s.



Ian Francis

**38.** Conventional moorland management at mid Deeside, North-east Scotland, October 2015. Red-listed and Schedule 1 species' breeding sites are often burnt out during this process.

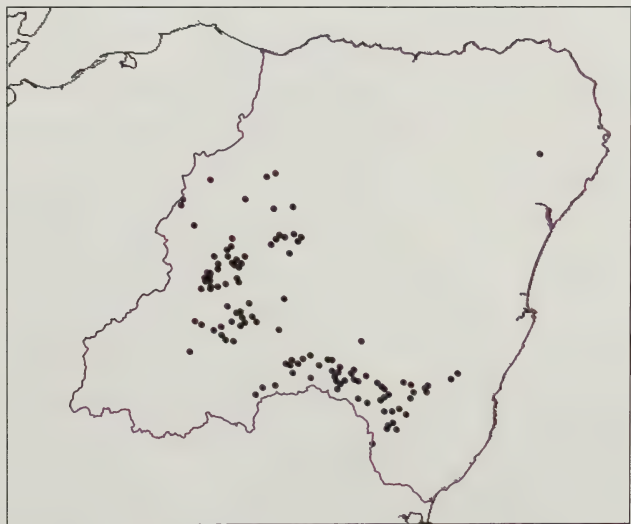
Collectively, targeted efforts in the intensive raptor study areas, and varied sources of information for other areas as outlined above, provided thorough coverage of all suitable Hen Harrier breeding habitat during 1980–2014.

### Monitoring and breeding criteria

An inventory of Hen Harrier breeding areas was updated annually, and sites were monitored on a regular basis using standardised methods (Watson 1977; Bibby & Etheridge 1993; Hardey *et al.* 2006). Full monitoring of known breeding areas was usually completed each year for the two raptor study areas, as well as for estates covered by Operation Falcon/ Raptor Watch (the latter covered 1,505 km<sup>2</sup> over 20 upland estates) and for the Glen Tanar SPA and Ladder Hills pSPA in targeted years. Almost full coverage of suitable habitat was achieved during years of Scottish or UK harrier surveys (1988–89, 1998, 2004 and 2010). In other years, a large number of breeding areas were checked for occupation during routine monitoring of other raptors (e.g. Etheridge *et al.* 2013).

Each record of a pair or single Hen Harrier from apparently suitable breeding habitat in April–July was categorised as a

confirmed, probable or possible breeding record according to the observed behaviour (table 1) and a six-figure grid reference was taken. Records within 1 km in the same year were amalgamated unless it was clear that more than one pair was involved. All grid references were plotted on 1:25,000 maps and the altitude of confirmed/probable breeding attempts recorded to the nearest 10 m, with the mean calculated for each breeding area. The core location of a breeding area was taken as the approximate central six-figure grid reference after linking all confirmed/probable breeding attempts for that area. The principal broad-scale land use within 1 km of



**Fig. 2.** The core locations of 118 confirmed/probable Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* breeding areas in the study area in 1980–2014 (some dots are partially overlapped).



<b>Table 1.</b> Criteria used to establish the breeding status of occupied Hen Harrier <i>Circus cyaneus</i> breeding areas in the study area, 1980–2014. Note that some of the behaviour criteria and interpretation for confirmed and probable breeding differ slightly from that used for national surveys (e.g. Sim et al. 2007 and Hayhow et al. 2013).	
Confirmed breeding	Active or used nest located (including predated eggs) Recently fledged young Adult visiting probable nest site Food pass from male to female At least one adult alarming/mobbing potential predator
Probable breeding	Adult carrying prey towards known breeding area Pair at potential breeding area Signs of occupation found (moulted feathers, prey remains, pellets, droppings) Adult(s) displaying over known or potential breeding area
Possible breeding	Single at, or near, known or potential breeding area

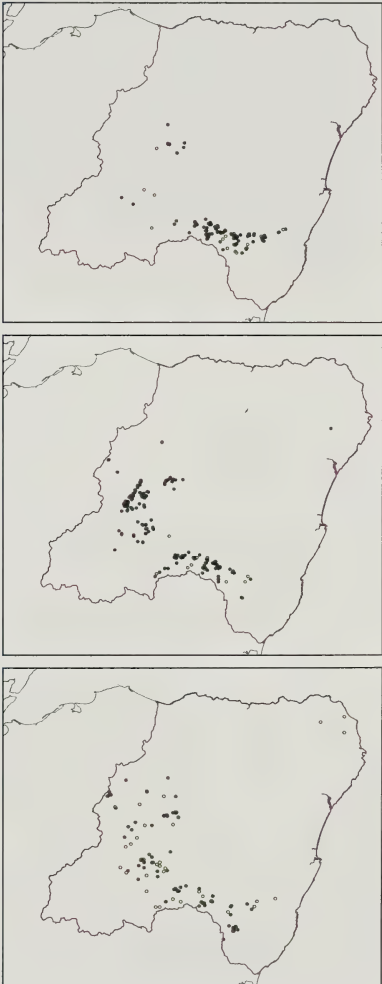
<b>Table 2.</b> Hen Harrier <i>Circus cyaneus</i> breeding-season records in the study area, 1940s to 1970s.		
Years	Breeding evidence	Source
Late 1940s to mid 1970s	Established on many moors on lower Deeside and Donside at 180–520 m.	1
1946	Adult male near Morven Lodge, and female above Loch Ullachie, both mid Deeside.	2
1948	Female above Loch Ullachie, mid Deeside.	2
1953	Bred on recently afforested moorland above Drumtochty, Mearns.	3
Early 1960s	Established on Glen Dye and Kerloch grouse moors, lower Deeside.	4
Late 1960s–1970s	Probably bred at Spyhill moor lower Deeside, and recently afforested moors of Fetteresso and Durris, Mearns.	2
Late 1960s–1978	One pair bred annually on north Kerloch grouse moor, lower Deeside (two pairs in 1975).	2
1968	Adult male hunting and probably bred at Rickarton grouse moor, Mearns.	5
1968–72	Recorded from 17 hectads in first breeding bird atlas. Confirmed breeding in seven hectads, probable in four and possible in six; with confirmed/probable hectads in the Mearns, lower and mid Deeside, upper Donside and Strath Bogie.	6
1969	Confirmed breeding on Glen Dye grouse moor, lower Deeside.	7
1970	One recently fledged young on recently afforested low-altitude moorland at Park-Cullerlie, lower Deeside.	2
1970–74	Some 5–15 nests located annually in Glen Dye and Kerloch grouse moors lower Deeside, and recently afforested moorland above Drumtochty, Mearns, in the first systematic study of the species in North-east Scotland.	4
1975	Confirmed breeding in recently afforested moorland on north Morven, upper Donside.	8
1976	Bred near Cockbridge, upper Donside.	9
1978	Confirmed breeding on grouse moor near Cairn o' Mount, lower Deeside.	10
1978	Bred successfully on grouse moor on southwest Morven, mid Deeside.	11
1979	Probably bred at north Kerloch and Cairn o' Mount grouse moors, lower Deeside.	12
Sources: 1) Nethersole-Thompson & Watson (1981). 2) Watson & Francis (2012). 3) J. Ogilvie pers. comm. 4) Picozzi (1978). 5) M. Marquiss pers. comm. 6) Sharrock (1976). 7) R. Rae pers. comm. 8) J. J. C. Hardey pers. obs. 9) Milsom (1976). 10) G. W. Rebecca and P. H. Shaw pers. obs. 11) B. L. Cosnette pers. obs. 12) B. L. Cosnette and G. W. Rebecca pers. obs.		

**Table 3.** Number of possible, probable and confirmed Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* breeding attempts located in the study area in 1980–2014 and number of confirmed/probable breeding areas when first located. Annual coverage was incomplete in 1980–87 and the area was fully covered in 1988–89 (Bibby & Etheridge 1993).

\* Indicates UK survey years where additional surveyors ensured thorough coverage.  
1,2,3 Indicates one, two and three cases of polygyny respectively (all one adult male and two females).

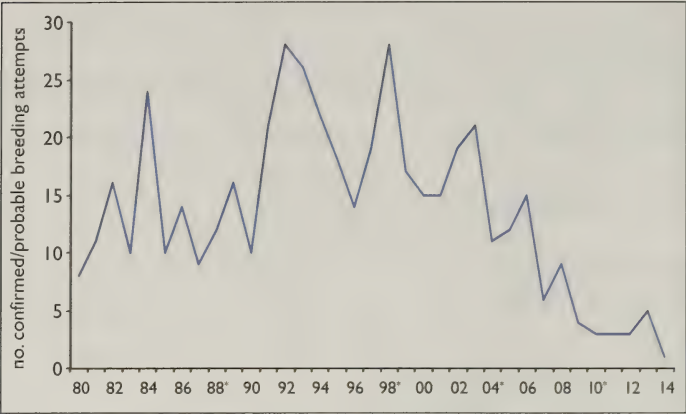
	breeding attempts				
	possible	probable	confirmed	confirmed/ probable	confirmed/ probable breeding areas first located
1980	2	-	8 <sup>1</sup>	8	5
1981	2	-	11 <sup>2</sup>	11	5
1982	2	1	15	16	7
1983	2	2	8	10	6
1984	4	7	17 <sup>1</sup>	24	8
1985	2	1	9 <sup>2</sup>	10	-
1986	4	1	13 <sup>1</sup>	14	4
1987	-	3	6	9	2
1988	2	6	6	12	4
1989	4	1	15 <sup>2</sup>	16	1
1990	2	5	5 <sup>1</sup>	10	-
1991	3	1	20 <sup>3</sup>	21	9
1992	3	3	25 <sup>1</sup>	28	9
1993	3	5	21	26	9
1994	5	3	19 <sup>1</sup>	22	4
1995	2	2	16	18	3
1996	1	5	9 <sup>1</sup>	14	4
1997	-	4	15	19	3
1998*	2	8	20	28	8
1999	2	3	14	17	4
2000	1	2	13 <sup>1</sup>	15	3
2001	3	1	14	15	1
2002	1	1	18	19	3
2003	2	6	15	21	6
2004*	2	4	7	11	1
2005	1	3	9 <sup>1</sup>	12	1
2006	8	4	11 <sup>1</sup>	15	1
2007	7	2	4	6	1
2008	6	1	8	9	2
2009	4	1	3	4	-
2010*	3	-	3	3	-
2011	2	1	2	3	-
2012	9	3	-	3	-
2013	2	1	4	5	2
2014	1	-	1	1	-
Totals	99	91	384	475	

each core location was assessed as either managed grouse moor, other heather moor, grass moor, young conifer plantation (including land earmarked for commercial forestry), scrub/brash from commercial forestry, mature conifer plantation (following Etheridge *et al.* 1997 and Sim *et al.* 2007) or young Scots Pine forest (including land earmarked for new native pine wood). For all survey and monitoring work, appropriate



**Fig. 3.** All confirmed/probable (black dots) and possible (yellow dots) Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* breeding attempts located in the study area in 1980–90 (top), 1991–2001 (middle) and 2002–14 (bottom). Data from table 3; note that some dots are partially or wholly overlapped, and annual coverage was incomplete in 1980–87.





**Fig. 4.** Number of confirmed/probable Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* breeding attempts located in the study area in 1980–2014. \* Represents Scottish or UK national survey years. Annual coverage was incomplete in 1980–87, but full coverage was achieved in 1988–89 combined, when a total of 22 breeding areas were identified (Bibby & Etheridge 1993).

Table 4. The principal broad-scale land use within 1 km of 118 confirmed/probable Hen Harrier <i>Circus cyaneus</i> breeding areas in the study area, 1980–2014. In general, land-use categories follow Etheridge et al. (1997) and Sim et al. (2007).	
Land use	No. breeding areas
Managed grouse moor	103 (87%)
Other heather moor	4 (3.5%)
Grass moor	–
Young conifer plantation <20 years	7 (6%)
Mature conifer plantation >20 years	–
Scrub/brash from commercial plantations	–
Young Scots Pine <i>Pinus sylvestris</i> forest	4 (3.5%)



**Fig. 5.** Distribution of confirmed/probable (black dots) and possible (yellow dots) Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* breeding attempts located in the study area in the two peak years: 1992 (left) and 1998 (right). Note that some black dots are partially overlapped.

Schedule 1 licences were obtained.

**Results**  
**Status and distribution**

As elsewhere in the UK, the Hen Harrier was a rare breeder in North-east Scotland at the beginning of the twentieth century (Sim 1903) but recolonised Deeside, Donside and the Mearns during the 1940s to the 1970s (table 2).

In total, 118 discrete Hen Harrier breeding areas were located during 1980–2014 (fig. 2) with 475 confirmed/probable and 99 possible breeding attempts recorded (table 3, fig. 3). We also noted 19 cases of polygyny, all involving one adult male and two females (table 3), a relatively uncommon breeding strategy in the UK (Watson 1977). During the first Scottish Hen Harrier survey, in 1988–89, 22 confirmed/probable breeding pairs were located (hereafter



Philip Newman/RSPB images

39. Female Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* at nest (paired with the male in plate 35), lower Deeside, North-east Scotland, June 1997.

‘breeding pairs’ or simply ‘pairs’). Thereafter, most suitable areas received at least basic annual coverage giving an annual average of 14 (range 1–28) breeding pairs located between 1988–89 and 2014 (table 3, fig. 4). The peak years were 1992 and 1998 when 28 pairs were located (table 3, figs. 4 & 5). The years with at least 20 pairs appear to represent genuine population increases, considering that 4–9 breeding areas previously unknown to us were located. Indeed, 27 such areas were located in 1991–93 (table 3). In contrast, only three breeding pairs were located annually in 2010–12, five in 2013 and

one in 2014 (table 3, fig. 4) with a maximum of two previously unknown breeding areas located in any one year during the last 11 years of the study (table 3). The latter period included two UK surveys (2004 and 2010), when additional paid surveyors were deployed to ensure thorough coverage. The trend from 1988–89 to 2014 showed a highly significant decrease in breeding pairs.

### Land use and altitude

In total, 103 (87%) of the 118 breeding areas were situated on managed grouse moors, with four (3.5%) on other heather moors, seven (6%) on young conifer plantations and four (3.5%) in young Scots Pine forest. All 11 of the coniferous woodland breeding areas were formerly managed grouse moors. There were no breeding areas located on grass-dominated moors, in mature conifer plantations or scrub/brash from commercial plantations (table 4). The breeding areas were located at altitudes between 150 and 650 m, with 95 (81%) in the 301–600 m zone (fig. 6).

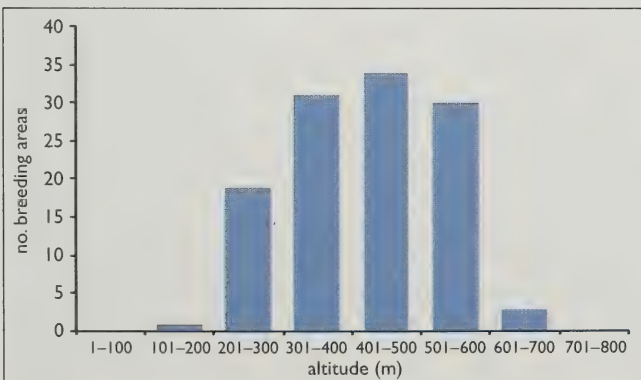


Fig. 6. Mean altitude of 118 confirmed/probable Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* breeding areas in the study area, 1980–2014.



## Case study – the Ladder Hills proposed Special Protection Area for Hen Harriers.

BOX 2

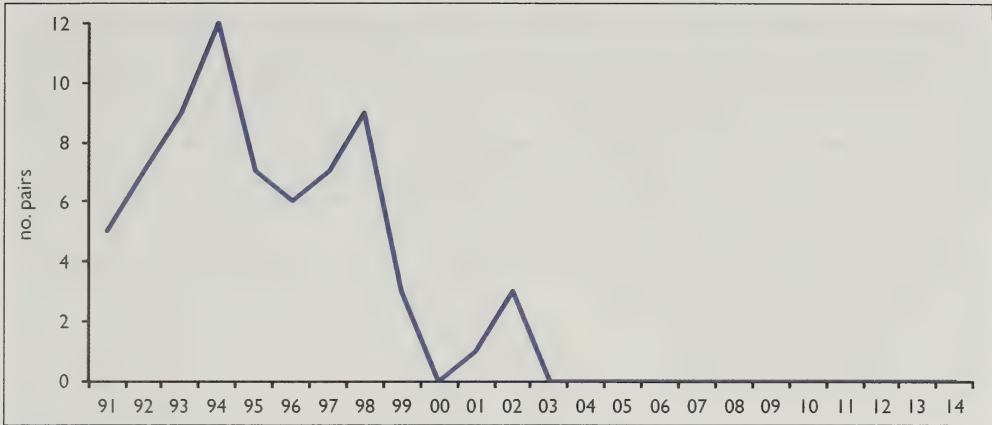
In 1995 and 1999, SNH approached the NESRSG and RSPB for information regarding Annex 1 species that were using the Ladder Hills SSSI (44 km<sup>2</sup>; fig. 1). In the 1990s, we strongly suspected that illegal persecution of Hen Harriers (and other raptors) was occurring at the Ladder Hills (there was no persecution of raptors at the JRS site in 1992–96). In 1998 (a national survey year, see Discussion), eight of the nine Hen Harrier nests located failed, with no obvious biological causes, and most pairs disappeared between survey visits (harriers often attempt to re-nest following a natural failure). In 1999 only three pairs were located.

Based on the data received, in early 2000 SNH proposed the Ladder Hills SSSI as an SPA, with Hen Harrier as the main qualifying interest. Subsequent discussions with SNH revealed that landowners had objected to the proposal, claiming there were insufficient numbers of Hen Harriers and questioning the authenticity of earlier data. In some years data was collected by NESRSG members with informal access (e.g. Etheridge *et al.* 1997) and in others by workers with full access arrangements (e.g. Redpath & Thirgood 1997, Francis *et al.* 1999, Sim *et al.* 2001).

In late 2000, the SNH position was that raptor persecution was likely on the Ladder Hills, but also that other factors such as habitat condition and prey availability might have also been contributing to the low occupancy and poor productivity of Hen Harriers. NESRSG and RSPB did not support the ‘habitat and prey deficiency’ hypothesis and were convinced that human interference was the primary cause of the decline, yet this was difficult to prove. A decision on SPA classification was deferred in 2000–03 while SNH commissioned further population survey and monitoring, and assessed prey availability and habitat suitability (Hardey & Craib 2001; Hardey *et al.* 2002–03). In 2002 and 2003 these studies extended to other areas in Aberdeenshire and Moray to enable comparison. The assessment concluded: ‘there are large areas of breeding habitat with suitable nest sites available across the site and no evidence of lack of prey’ (R. MacDonald, SNH Area Manager, Grampian, *in litt.* to Ian Francis, February 2004). Nevertheless, breeding numbers did not recover (fig. 7) and the site was removed from the pSPA list following review. Concurrently, the site was designated as an SAC under the EU Habitats Directive and is now also part of the recently established Cairngorms National Park.

We welcomed the SAC and subsequent National Park designations, but do not consider them as appropriate substitutes for an SPA for Hen Harriers. In the 1990s we had one of the best areas in the UK for this species. Grouse-moor owners and managers did not agree with this assessment (and possible SPA designation) presumably because they believed their management would be open to greater scrutiny.

We contend that SPA designation should have been pursued using either the average Hen Harrier breeding figures from the 1990s, as had been done for similar notified pSPAs in Scotland, or on the basis of the suitable ecological conditions, with the expectation that harriers would recolonise the area with protection (e.g. Hardey & Craib 2001). The Scottish Government appears committed to eradicating Hen Harrier persecution and enhancing its breeding status (Scottish Government 2013; Wheelhouse 2013) but the Ladder Hills scenario is inconsistent with these objectives. There was no support for the ‘habitat and prey deficiency’ hypothesis following the commissioned research, and no reasons were given for the non-designation of the pSPA. The habitat and prey availability at the Ladder Hills SSSI/SAC are still considered suitable for breeding Hen Harriers (e.g. Hardey & Craib 2001, Francis & Cook 2011) and if harriers were to recover in North-east Scotland, the site should be reconsidered as a pSPA. This case demonstrates how transparency and trust might not always be the best course of action for species in conflict with humans (see Discussion).



**Fig. 7.** Number of pairs of Hen Harriers *Circus cyaneus* using the Ladder Hills SSSI in 1991–2014 (either breeding within the SSSI or nearby and foraging in it).

## Discussion

### Past and current status and distribution

Following recolonisation of North-east Scotland by the late 1970s, the Hen Harrier breeding population peaked in the 1990s at 28 pairs, though the species was almost certainly under-recorded in the early to mid 1980s. The population then declined rapidly, to only three pairs by 2010, in part we believe as a consequence of the necessary trans-

parency of the methods and reporting for the 1998 national survey. In 1998, RSPB surveyors were required to liaise fully with estates over access and report their findings, and in extreme cases were accompanied by a gamekeeper on survey visits. This transparency was deemed to be necessary because of earlier mistrust during the advocating of Hen Harrier pSPAs in Scotland (for example, see Box 2). SPA designation has not worked for the Hen Harrier in North-



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**40.** Female Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* approaching nest site with prey, Highland, July 2006.



east Scotland, however, as the main site was removed from the pSPA list (Box 2) and there were no pairs at Glen Tanar in 2012–14, despite the estate planning to offer opportunities to photograph harriers.

In 2013, adults at two breeding areas were shot and the nests failed (RSPB 2015a), while a further two pairs failed to rear young. In 2014 only one breeding pair was located. The most plausible explanations for the lack of harriers are related to grouse-moor management. Some of the factors involved (Urquhart 1993, Scott 2001, Kirk 2006) are obviously illegal, while others are more subtle, such as the previous year's nest sites being burnt out in the non-breeding period. Burning large areas of mature heather (including old nest sites) occurs during conventional moorland management (which is increasing nationally; Douglas *et al.* 2015; plate 38), but is not recommended by either the Moorland Working Group (1998) or expert advisers on good practice for grouse moors, since it has a negative impact on winter refuge and feeding areas for grouse (Watson & Miller 1976; Philips & Watson 1995; Potts 1998a).

Lesser factors in the Hen Harrier's decline include commercial conifer afforestation and natural pine-wood regeneration of breeding areas. Unexpectedly, young conifer plantations were rarely reused for nesting after afforestation, and native pine-wood breeding areas were unoccupied long before forest maturity. This may have reflected differences in breeding habitat quality with the remaining low-density population gravitating towards the best breeding areas on open moorland (Sergio & Newton 2003). It was beyond the scope of this study to assess habitat quality overall but we believe that low occupancy of young conifer woodlands was a symptom of the wider decline.

### Future status and distribution

There is ample suitable breeding habitat and potential prey in North-east Scotland for Hen Harriers (Hardey *et al.* 2002–03; Francis & Cook 2011). We consider that around 9–12 breeding areas are now unsuitable due to habitat change, largely through afforestation, leaving over 100 suitable areas. In the peak years in the 1990s, around 30 breeding areas

were occupied. This should be achievable in the future but is unlikely in the current climate, where estates fear that, without intervention, harriers could increase to levels similar to those on Langholm Moor at the end of the JRS, when grouse shooting ceased (Thirgood *et al.* 2000b).

Assessing potential Hen Harrier breeding density is complex, with key factors including productivity, climate, topography, habitat, associated land management, prey availability, predation, emigration, immigration and overwinter survival. Potts (1998b) estimated that if all apparently suitable Hen Harrier breeding habitat in the UK was occupied, and there was no illegal persecution, there could be up to 1,660 nesting females, equivalent to one female (or pair) per 25 km<sup>2</sup> – a density considered unlikely to have any significant economic effect on a grouse moor. However, Hen Harriers can breed semi-colonially (Simmons 2000), something that grouse-moor managers believe will have a significant impact on grouse numbers. Potts (1998b) reasoned that if grouse-moor management was withdrawn from extensive areas, harriers would struggle to achieve even the low-density of one pair per 25 km<sup>2</sup>, because of likely land-use change (to commercial forestry or intensive grazing) and increased predation by Red Foxes *Vulpes vulpes* (Baines & Richardson 2013; McMillan 2014).

As part of a framework for the conservation of Hen Harriers in the UK, Fielding *et al.* (2011) used models to predict breeding distributions. The variables included habitat, topography, climate and the presence of Golden Eagles (the Golden Eagle is an intra-guild predator; Fielding *et al.* 2003), but excluded persecution, the presence of Foxes and prey availability as full data for these were unavailable. Data from the 2004 UK Hen Harrier survey (Sim *et al.* 2007) was used as a basis for developing the models, leading to predicted potential densities of between 1.21 and 1.28 breeding pairs per 25 km<sup>2</sup> of suitable habitat. Using the three density figures discussed above, and estimates of the extent of key habitats (see p. 81), indicates that North-east Scotland could support around 105–135 breeding pairs of Hen Harriers in the absence of persecution.



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41. Male Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* alarm-calling at intruder, Highland, July 2006. This type of defensive behaviour was a criterion for confirmed breeding in the current study in North-east Scotland.

## Potential solutions

Initiatives to help conserve Hen Harriers in North-east Scotland included partnerships such as Operation Falcon and Raptor Watch, as well as the proposed designation of SSSIs (Box 2), but ultimately these have been unsuccessful. Consequently, levels of trust and cooperation between most raptor enthusiasts and grouse-moor estates in North-east Scotland are at an all-time low. The Scottish Government is deeply concerned about the status of the Hen Harrier and appears determined to stop the persecution of this species (Scottish Government 2013; Wheelhouse 2013). SNH recently commissioned scientists to formulate a conservation framework for Hen Harriers as part of their commitment to biodiversity and nature conservation in the EU (Fielding *et al.* 2011), and they are also a major partner at the Langholm Moor Demonstration Project and, in 2013, initiated a 'Heads up for Harriers' public awareness project through the Scottish Partnership Against Wildlife Crime. The RSPB has recently embarked on a five-year EU LIFE+ project to restore the fortunes of Hen Harriers in English and Scottish Hen Harrier

SPAs, most of which are currently in unfavourable condition (RSPB 2015b).

Hen Harriers are not the only losers in the harrier–grouse conservation conflict. Large amounts of resources have been invested in national surveys, nest monitoring and protection, satellite tracking and various recovery projects, much of which relies on public funding; while increasing amounts of time and resources are being invested by Police Scotland for investigations of illegal activity and associated educational work. Few of the initiatives, surveys and projects described here would have been necessary if harriers had a similar status on grouse-moors as they have in the rest of their UK breeding range, and if attitudes were to change the problem would almost certainly be solved. If the current situation persists, grouse-moor managers will continue to attract criticism (e.g. ECRA 2014, Wightman & Tingay 2015). There are now sustained calls for the industry to be regulated or even banned (e.g. Avery 2015) and these are likely to intensify if the Hen Harrier is lost from increasing parts of its breeding range in the UK.

SNH (in conjunction with Police Scotland) can recommend 'buffer zones' around





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42. Female Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* at Glen Tanar SPA, North-east Scotland, June 2011. The Glen Tanar estate has recently offered a range of wildlife photography opportunities – this bird was utilising supplementary food placed near the nest.

occupied nests of Schedule 1 species if disturbance is predicted to negatively affect the breeding attempt<sup>1</sup>. To our knowledge, this measure has not been used for harriers on grouse moors, though it has been implemented during windfarm and power-line developments for Hen Harriers and Merlins, and in relation to forest harvesting and rally-car racing for other scarce raptors. Nest cameras can help to identify causes of nest failure (McMillan 2014) and could be used in conjunction with any buffer zone. We also recommend that supplementary feeding at Hen Harrier nests should be subject to further trials since the technique has shown much promise, despite recent contradictory evidence of its value (New *et al.* 2012; plate 42). Breeding harriers are now sufficiently scarce in North-east Scotland that urgent action is required to prevent the loss of this species as a breeding bird.

If, against all the odds, Hen Harriers were to recover, grouse-moor estates could manage habitat in the breeding areas to increase heather and reduce grass cover. This should reduce vole *Microtus* densities, and help to ensure that harrier numbers do not increase to levels that could affect grouse shooting (Thirgood *et al.* 2000b; New *et al.* 2011). Encouraging more Golden Eagles to reach natural densities would also help, since they are predicted to suppress harriers through intra-guild competition (Fielding *et al.* 2003). Although Golden Eagles also feed on Red Grouse, they have large home ranges and are considered less of a problem for grouse than harriers (Thirgood *et al.* 2000a). Intra-guild predation is complex (Sergio & Hiraldo 2008) and this type of innovative land management has not yet been tested over an extensive area. North-east Scotland provides a potential area where this measure

<sup>1</sup> Buffer or protection zones are essentially a 'safe working distance' around breeding sites. They are frequently used by conservation managers to avoid disturbance (Ruddock & Whitfield 2007). A Hen Harrier nest-site buffer zone could have a radius in the region of 500–750 m, but distances vary with stage of breeding and topography, and this subject may need further testing.

could be trialled with the prospect that, if successful, both harriers and eagles could occur with no serious adverse impact on grouse numbers. Ideally, a Hen Harrier Recovery Project Officer, representing the major stakeholders advocating a recovery, should be installed to promote the recovery case, liaise with estates and oversee any new initiatives. Whatever happens in the short-to-mid term will be crucial for the species' future prospects, and we shall endeavour to continue monitoring the breeding areas.

The current situation is clearly untenable in terms of both UK and EU legislation. The time is right for Government organisations such as SNH and Police Scotland to take the lead formally in advocating and overseeing a Hen Harrier recovery plan in North-east Scotland. The legislation to support a recovery is in place, but needs implementation, as elsewhere in the UK. In 1998, former Scottish Secretary of State, the late Donald Dewar, described raptor persecution in Scotland as 'a national disgrace'. More than 15 years later, it seems that not much has changed.

## Disclaimer

The views expressed and actions recommended are our own opinions and are not necessarily those of the RSPB or Scottish Raptor Study Group.

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RSPB licence 100021787. We thank Mick Marquiss (NESRSG), Duncan Orr-Ewing and Staffan Roos (RSPB) and Patrick Stirling-Aird and Wendy Mattingley (SRSG) for helpful comments. We dedicate this paper to the late Jim Chapman and the late Philip Newman – both enthusiastic supporters of nature conservation in North-east Scotland.

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# Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain in 2013

## Part 2: passerines

Steve White and Chris Kehoe

Alan Harris



Female Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*

**Abstract** This report presents data on scarce passerine migrants recorded in Britain during 2013. As in the non-passerine section (*Brit. Birds* 109: 21–45), it was a record year for three of the species discussed here: Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*, Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* and Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*. The total of 2,191 Yellow-browed Warblers was extraordinary, an increase of almost 50% on the previous record, itself less than a decade old. There were three ‘second-best’ totals – Dusky Warbler *P. fuscatus*, Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* and Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus* – and three third-best as well – Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*, Greenish Warbler *P. trochiloides* and Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*. Among the species doing poorly were Aquatic Warbler *A. paludicola* and Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*, with just one and four accepted records respectively; both species were readmitted to the BBRC fold from the start of 2015. Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta* and Ortolan Bunting *E. hortulana* are not in imminent danger of becoming national rarities but the latter in particular is a cause for concern: there were just 22 in Britain in 2013.

Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*

Total 1968–2013	No. 2013 (rank/46)	Other annual maxima 1968–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
3,979	60 (33)	1994/235/1 1992 & 2012/184/2=	Decline	Low

Annual means 1968–2013
<u>1968–69</u> 34
<u>1970–79</u> 51
<u>1980–89</u> 84
<u>1990–99</u> 132
<u>2000–09</u> 85
<u>2010–13</u> 97

After the second-highest total in 2012, the 2013 total was the lowest since 2007. Breeding was not confirmed anywhere in Britain in 2013 (Holling *et al.* 2015) but three birds possibly involved in breeding attempts have been excluded from these figures.

As ever, many more were seen in spring (April–June) than in autumn: 52 and eight respectively. The extreme dates were 17th April, in Sussex and on Anglesey, and 26th October in Cornwall. Distribution was essentially similar to that in recent years, with the largest totals being 11 on Scilly and five in Cornwall. Less frequently visited counties included Argyll, Berkshire, Derbyshire, Gloucestershire and Lancashire & N Merseyside. More surprising were the low numbers in normally high-scoring counties: just two in both Shetland and Yorkshire, and one in Kent.

(Breeds NW Africa & widely throughout Europe from Mediterranean N to S Sweden & S Finland, Russia, Turkey & Caucasus to NW Iran. Winters equatorial & southern Africa.)

Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*

Total 1986–2013	No. 2013 (rank/28)	Other annual maxima 1986–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
6,219	440 (1)	1988/423/2 1998/374/3	None	Moderate

Annual means 1986–2013
<u>1986–89</u> 256
<u>1990–99</u> 231
<u>2000–09</u> 202
<u>2010–13</u> 215

After three rather poor years, more migrant Red-backed Shrikes were reported during 2013 than in any year since 1986, when the first national totals of migrants were compiled. After the first arrivals, on 9th May at sites in Shetland, Orkney and Fair Isle, birds were recorded in every month until November, with the last on St Agnes (Scilly) on 15th. The earliest English record was on 12th May in Cleveland.

The majority appeared in spring, mostly during May and June, but there were 12 late migrants or wanderers in July. Of the total of 320 in spring, 172 were in Scotland: 70 in Shetland, 48 in Orkney, 20 on Fair Isle and 10 in North-east Scotland; one at Strathy Point (Highland) was the only Scottish record away from the east coast. Most of the remainder were on the east coast of England, including 45 in Yorkshire, 32 in Norfolk, 15 in Co. Durham and 14 in Cleveland. Only seven were seen in southern England, spread thinly from Cornwall to Kent, and the only Welsh bird in spring was in the Preseli Mountains (Pembrokeshire) on 2nd June. Where the sex was reported, 109 were males and 69 females.

The first juveniles appeared in the last week of August; most of the 120 autumn migrants passed through between late August and mid September, with 12 in October and three in November. Shetland accounted for 14 of the 32 Scottish records and North-east Scotland seven. Compared with the spring, birds were more frequent in southern England, where eight of the 26 were on Scilly, but again there were more on the east coast, including 18 in Norfolk and 15 in Yorkshire. Four were found in inland counties: singles in Wiltshire and Cambridgeshire and two in Berkshire. There were just two Welsh records, in Gower and Pembrokeshire.

The distribution and timing of records in 2013 was broadly similar to those of recent years. During 2008–12 some 60% were seen in spring and 40% in autumn; 55% of spring and 31% of autumn records were in Scotland with equivalent figures for southern England being 9% and





29%, and for eastern England 34% and 36%. And, as in 2013, Red-backed Shrikes were very scarce in Wales during that period (12 records) and in central and north-west England (20 records).

Although annual totals of Red-backed Shrikes do fluctuate, the ten-year means have remained quite steady for around 30 years, consistent with the stable trend in breeding birds throughout Europe (PECBMS 2014). Two pairs nested in Britain in 2013 (Holling *et al.* 2015) but, despite healthy numbers of migrants reaching Britain each year, widespread recolonisation is perhaps a distant prospect (see Davies & Lock 2016).

(Widespread breeder from N Spain E to Greece & N through Europe to C Fennoscandia, Russia E to Ob River in C Siberia, Turkey & Caucasus region S to NW Iran. Winters equatorial & S Africa.)

43. First-winter Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*, Canvey, Essex, September 2013.

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*

Total 1986–2013	No. 2013 (rank/28)	Other annual maxima 1986–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
4,053	222 (4)	2011/327/1    2010/266/2	Increase	Moderate

Annual means 1986–2013
1986–89 132
1990–99 128
2000–09 126
2010–13 248

Five of the six highest annual totals since at least 1986 have been recorded in the past six years and it is now clear that sightings are on an upward trend. In all, 259 were reported in 2013 but 37 of those were regarded as overwintering or probably returning birds, 14% of the total and a somewhat lower proportion than the 20% in 2011–12.

Forty-eight were first reported during the winter months (January, February and December) in 28 recording areas, but at least 12 of those first seen in October and November also remained into December. The best estimate of the wintering population from these figures is thus 60. However, wintering Great Grey Shrikes can be surprisingly elusive and this is probably a significant underestimate; it is quite possible that some of the eight first seen in March and

six in April may also have wintered in Britain. Again, two extensive sites accounted for a high proportion of the wintering records, with seven in the Clocaenog Forest (Denbighshire) and six in the New Forest (Hampshire).

One at Lake Vyrnwy (Montgomeryshire) on 3rd June was an extremely late record from this fairly regular wintering area (for example, birds seen in early spring in 2011 and 2012). This date and the inland location suggests an attempt at over-summering, similar to the record of one in Cumbria in July 2009, which was presumed to be the same individual seen at the same site in April of that year. The only other June records since 1986 were in Northumberland and Yorkshire



Conor Malloy

44. Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*, Thursley Common, Surrey, February 2013.

in 1986, Derbyshire in 1993 and Shetland in 1996, each remaining for just one day and possibly very tardy migrants.

Despite the relatively small numbers, Great Grey Shrike is one of our most widespread scarce migrants and records came from 52 recording areas throughout England, Scotland and Wales during the year. The first autumn migrant arrived on 27th September and most of the rest appeared during October, with 102 during 10th–20th. An arrival of 12 at Spurn (Yorkshire) on 13th October was by far the largest single-site count since 1986. The highest county totals for the whole year were 35 in Norfolk and 27 in Yorkshire, but relatively few were found in the Northern Isles during 2013 with seven in Shetland the highest total.

(Breeds Fennoscandia, C Europe & Russia E across Siberia to Pacific coast, Alaska and N Canada. Northern breeders migratory, wintering to S of breeding range.)

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
997	32 (3)	2011/55/1 1997/36/2	Increase	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2013
1958–59 13
1960–69 12
1970–79 13
1980–89 16
1990–99 21
2000–09 22
2010–13 35

Although the European breeding population is regarded as being in moderate decline (PECBMS 2014), the number of migrants reaching Britain has risen steadily since the early years of this century; four of the six highest annual totals have been recorded in the past six years.

The 32 seen in 2013 (all records were of singles) were scattered across 20 recording areas with only two counties – Cornwall (8) and Norfolk (4) – having more than two birds. There were five in Wales – Caernarfonshire, Gower, Gwent and Pembrokeshire (two); and four individuals in Scotland – Argyll, Isle of May,

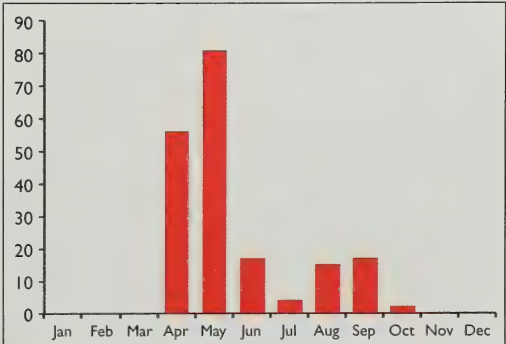


Fig. 1. Arrival dates of Woodchat Shrikes *Lanius senator* in Britain by month, 2008–13.



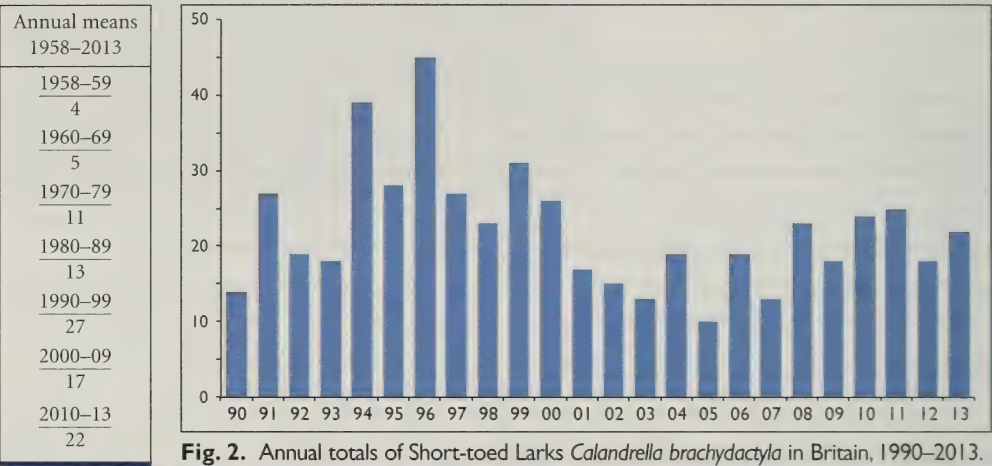
Orkney and Shetland. The bird on Westray (Orkney) on 26th May, also seen on Foula (Shetland) on 28th May, was accepted by the BBRC as a ‘Balearic Woodchat Shrike’ *L. s. badius* (Hudson *et al.* 2014).

Most Woodchat Shrikes that turn up in Britain are spring overshoots – 71% of all records over the past six years have been in spring, between April and June (fig. 1). Spring 2013 produced 28 records between 15th April and 19th June, while just four – all in England – were seen in autumn, between 17th August and 7th September. The age was reported for only two autumn birds, both juveniles.

(Breeds NW Africa & Mediterranean Europe N to C France & S Germany, E through S Turkey to W Iran & S to Israel. Winters in N & C equatorial Africa.)

Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
828	22 (12)	1996/45/1    1994/39/2	None	Low



45. Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*, Sumburgh, Shetland, May 2013.

Roger Riddington

The European breeding population of this species is thought to be stable (PECBMS 2014) and this is borne out by the relatively similar numbers of migrants reaching Britain each year since about 2000 (fig. 2). The year 2013 was fairly typical in terms of distribution and the timing of arrivals. In spring, the first appeared on Bryher (Scilly) on 20th April with another on St Mary's (Scilly) on 24th, followed by seven in May – in Devon, Norfolk, Orkney, Outer Hebrides, Scilly and Shetland (two).

The first of the autumn was also on Bryher – a long-stayer from 9th to 31st August – and the last was on Lundy (Devon) on 23rd October. Of the 13 autumn birds, four were in Shetland, three on Scilly and singles in Devon, Dorset, Fair Isle, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, and at Llanon (Ceredigion) on 19th October, the only Welsh record.

Despite the overall total climbing steadily towards the 1,000 mark, no individuals have yet been assigned by BOU to a particular taxon (BOU 2013). If records were considered at the racial level, it seems likely that one or more races would be returned to the BBRC fold.

(Breeds NW Africa & European Mediterranean Basin to Black Sea region of Turkey & S Russia, E through C Asia to Mongolia & NW China. Winters along S edge of Sahara from Senegal to Sudan, Arabian Peninsula & N Indian subcontinent.)

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
837	28 (9)	2012/68/1    1987/61/2	Large increase	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2013
1958–59 1
1960–69 2
1970–79 4
1980–89 12
1990–99 15
2000–09 31
2010–13 49

Average annual totals have increased threefold since the 1990s and there is little sign that this upward trend is slowing. The bulk of records normally involve overshooting spring migrants (fig. 3) and 2013 conformed to this pattern, with two in March – the first at Waltham Brooks (Sussex) on 18th – followed by seven in April, 14 in May and three in June (the last on 17th). There were just two autumn records, both in September (Land's End, Cornwall, on 4th and Landguard, Suffolk, on 26th).

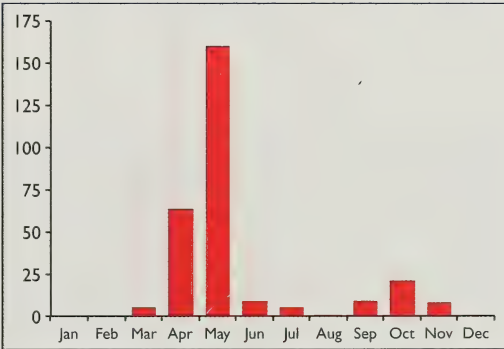


Fig. 3. Arrival dates of Red-rumped Swallows *Cecropis daurica* in Britain by month, 2008–13.

In terms of distribution, there were three Scottish records – two in Shetland and one in Highland. The remainder were in England where eight records in Kent included a noteworthy run of five at Dungeness between 24th April and 25th May. Most of the remainder were in coastal counties between Scilly and Yorkshire. There were three records in inland counties, with birds at Beddington Farmlands (Greater London) on 12th and 24th–25th May, and Barton-in-Fabis (Nottinghamshire) on 26th April.

The reasons for the recent increase are unclear, since the breeding range has not expanded north of Mediterranean France. Other factors, perhaps including climate change, may be involved, affecting the timing of migration, winter distribution and/or migration routes; the same factors could potentially also affect the hirundines breeding farther north.

(Widespread breeder in NW Africa & Mediterranean Europe N to S France & E through Balkans & Greece to W & S Turkey, Middle East & C Asia. Wintering area assumed to lie in N equatorial Africa.)



Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
623	40 (3)	2005/47/1    2007/42/2	Increase	Moderate

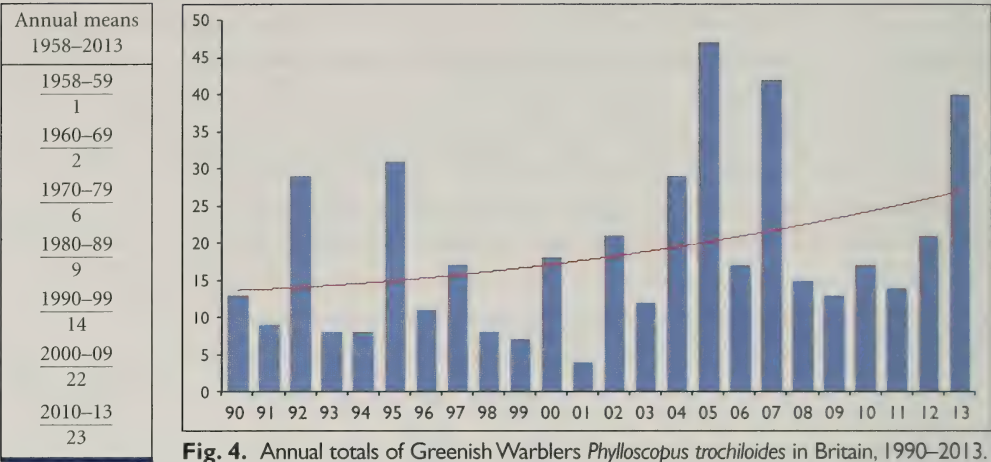


Fig. 4. Annual totals of Greenish Warblers *Phylloscopus trochiloides* in Britain, 1990–2013.

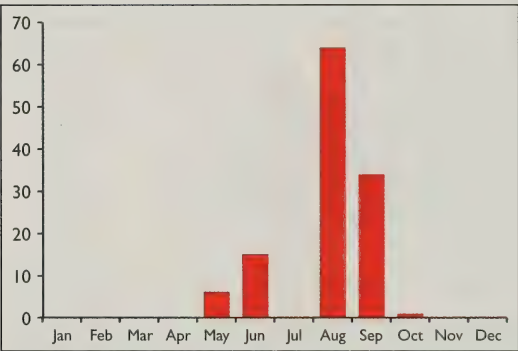


Fig. 5. Arrival dates of Greenish Warblers *Phylloscopus trochiloides* in Britain by month, 2008–13.

Annual totals over the last 20 years have shown a slow but steady increase, averaging a little over 20 since the year 2000 but with occasional influx years; 2013 was one such year, the third best on record (fig. 4).

The recent run of singing males in spring continued, with four of the seven records between 28th May and 18th June reported as such; of these, one at Turton Golf Course (Lancashire & N Merseyside) on 13th–18th June stayed longest. August is typically the peak month for arrivals (fig. 5), but in 2013 all the autumn birds arrived in that month, which is unusual (although one remained on Foula, Shetland, until 2nd Sep-tember).



46. Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*, Turton Golf Course, Lancashire & N Merseyside, June 2013.

Greenish Warblers were seen in 16 recording areas in 2013, the highest totals being nine in Shetland, five in Yorkshire and North-east Scotland,

and four in Norfolk. There were just two records anywhere in southern England, in Dorset and Scilly, and one in Wales, in Pembrokeshire.

(In Europe breeds E Germany to S Finland, E through Russia to Yenisey River & S through NW Mongolia to N Afghanistan & NW Himalayas. Winters throughout Indian subcontinent.)

Pallas’s Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
2,466	57 (17)	2003/313/1    2004/197/2	Declining after increase	Very high

Annual means 1958–2013
<u>1958–59</u> 1
<u>1960–69</u> 3
<u>1970–79</u> 9
<u>1980–89</u> 39
<u>1990–99</u> 83
<u>2000–09</u> 90
<u>2010–13</u> 56

Following a run of mediocre years, the 57 recorded in 2013 was an improvement, yet still only modest when compared with numbers in the late 1990s and early 2000s; indeed, annual totals are currently more similar to those of the 1980s.

There were three winter records: two in Norfolk and a long-stayer at Moor Green Lakes (Berkshire) from 3rd January to 18th April. After a blank spring, the first of the autumn was on 11th October, and was followed by a further 51 during that month and, unusually, only two in November, the last on St Mary’s (Scilly) on 4th. Birds were found in 13 recording areas, four in Scotland and the remainder in eastern and southern England. As usual Norfolk (18) and Yorkshire (12) were the highest-scoring counties.

(Breeds S Siberia from Baikal region E to Ussuriland, NE China & S to N Mongolia. Winters E China to S of Yangtze River & throughout Indochina S to C Thailand.)

Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*

Total 1968–2013	No. 2013 (rank/46)	Other annual maxima 1968–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
20,106	2,191 (1)	2005/1,469/2    2008/1,446/3	Large increase	Moderate

Annual means 1968–2013
<u>1968–69</u> 50
<u>1970–79</u> 76
<u>1980–89</u> 322
<u>1990–99</u> 328
<u>2000–09</u> 749
<u>2010–13</u> 1,320

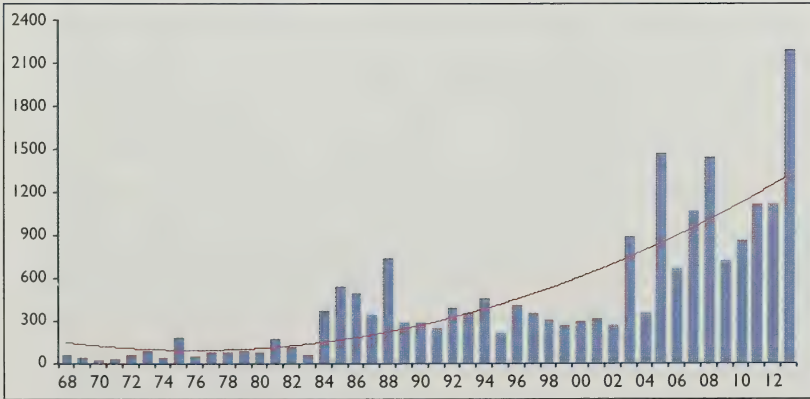


Fig. 6. Annual totals of Yellow-browed Warblers *Phylloscopus inornatus* in Britain, 1968–2013.

The staggering rise in the number of Yellow-browed Warblers reaching Britain shows absolutely no sign of slowing. Annual totals first jumped in the mid 1980s before undergoing a step-change in the early years of the present century (fig. 6). Overall, numbers have increased 15-fold since



the 1970s, and 2013 surpassed the previous annual record total by almost 50%. And, while this remains an extremely popular species with birders, it is possible that some degree of 'reporting fatigue' may be setting in. Many recording areas where this species is now commonplace in autumn provide estimated monthly or seasonal totals and it is possible that some may err on the side of caution. The figures for recent years may be underestimates compared with previous annual totals.

The numbers overwintering in Britain have also increased over the last decade or so but there is no indication that the proportion of winter records is increasing; this averages less than 1% of annual totals since 2008. Four were first seen in January this year and nine in December, to which should be added five birds that arrived in November and remained into mid to late December.

Typically, though, the vast majority arrived in autumn. For counties where dates were specified, 1,127 arrived in September, 906 in October and 66 in November, a higher proportion than usual in September, pointing to a slightly earlier arrival than over the past few years. Although first dates do appear to have moved forward since about 2005, for the ten years or so prior to this, the trend was towards a later first-arrival date, so there is no clear-cut medium-term trend.

After the first bird, in Shetland on 10th September, Yellow-browed Warblers flooded in during the final ten days of the month with continued arrivals of large numbers into October, before beginning to tail off at the end of the month. Arrival dates differed significantly between regions: the bulk of September records were in the Northern Isles, while in the southwest most arrivals were in October (and those on the east coast of England were split much more evenly between the two months; table 1). This is strongly suggestive of a movement of migrants across Britain from the northeast to the southwest over the course of the autumn, but it could also be the result of separate waves of migration.

Birds were seen in 52 recording areas – the same number as for Great Grey Shrike, whose population size is around 90% smaller. This illustrates the concentration of Yellow-browed Warblers in coastal areas; for example, there were only 20 records in ten landlocked English counties. As usual, the list was headed by Shetland where a staggering 1,381 bird-days were recorded,

estimated by the recorder to have involved some 500 birds. Other large totals included 201 in Orkney, 142 in Yorkshire, 120 in Cornwall, 119 in Norfolk, 112 on Scilly, 88 in Northumberland, 70 on Fair Isle, 58 in Lothian and 54 in North-east Scotland. Wales also fared relatively well with 57 records, 33 of them in Caernarfonshire of which 22 were on Bardsey.

There remain two great unanswered questions. First, what has caused this remarkable upsurge? As far



47. Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*, Virkie, Shetland, October 2013.

**Table 1.** Number of Yellow-browed Warblers *Phylloscopus inornatus* recorded during autumn 2013 in selected regions of Britain.

	September	October	November	Total
Northern Isles	586	184	1	771
(Shetland, Fair Isle, Orkney)	76%	24%	<1%	
English east coast	322	245	1	568
(Northumberland–Essex)	57%	43%	<1%	
Southwest England	17	245	50	312
(Scilly, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset)	5%	79%	16%	

as we know there is no documented evidence for either a population increase or a westward shift in breeding distribution that might explain this scale of increase. Second, where do they go next? Looking at the paucity of records in northwest Iberia, de Juana & Garcia (2015) suggested that many birds eventually reorientate to their normal wintering grounds. Alternatively, many more than are reported may be wintering in the Western Palearctic or West Africa; yet the great rarity of this species in spring, either in Britain or anywhere else in Europe, suggests that really rather few do overwinter successfully. The fact that ageing birds in the field in autumn is not possible makes it difficult to establish whether many return as adults in subsequent years, although there is no evidence of this from ringing data. Sadly, the most likely scenario is that most simply continue on a westward trajectory and perish in the North Atlantic. Records from the Azores in 2001 and 2014 demonstrate that some at least continue heading southwest.

(Breeds Russia from Urals to NE Siberia, S to N Mongolia & NE China. Winters NE India, S China, Indochina & Malay Peninsula S to Singapore.)

Radde’s Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
376	11 (13)	2000/31/1 1991/25/2	None	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2013
<u>1958–59</u> 0
<u>1960–69</u> 1
<u>1970–79</u> 2
<u>1980–89</u> 6
<u>1990–99</u> 10
<u>2000–09</u> 14
<u>2010–13</u> 10

Radde’s Warbler remains just above the threshold for national rarity status, with the most recent ten-year mean standing at 12. All records are listed below.

- 3rd–4th October, Isle of May
- 5th October, Berry Head (Devon)
- 12th October, Sheepcote Valley, Brighton (Sussex)
- 13th October, Buckton (Yorkshire)
- 13th–15th October, Anton Lakes (Hampshire)
- 16th October, Shingle Street (Suffolk)
- 16th October, Whitburn CP (Co. Durham)
- 19th October, St Agnes (Scilly)
- 19th October, St Abb’s Head (Borders)
- 25th October, Happisburgh (Norfolk)
- 26th October, Titchfield Haven (Hampshire)

Elsewhere in Europe, Radde’s Warbler is a top-class rarity, not even annual in the counties in which it has occurred. After Britain, the Netherlands has the highest total with 38 records (the most recent accepted records in 2014), followed by Finland with 25 (2009), Denmark 22 (2013), Germany 16 (2013), Ireland 16 (2009) and France 12 (2011).

(Breeds S Siberia from Ob River region E to Ussuriland & NE China. Migrates through E China to winter N Burma & Indochina S to C Thailand.)



Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
436	28 (2)	2011/36/1    2001/26/3	None	High

Annual means 1958–2013
1958–59
0
1960–69
1
1970–79
1
1980–89
5
1990–99
13
2000–09
14
2010–13
23

Although the number of Radde’s and Dusky Warblers recorded since 1958 are not dissimilar and neither has shown any clear trend since 1990, the most recent ten-year mean for Dusky stands at 16, safely above the rarity threshold – by and large thanks to bumper totals of 36 in 2011 and 28 in the current year, 2013.

One on St Mary’s (Scilly) on 8th–11th January echoed one that wintered there in 2011/12 – could it even be the same bird? There were no spring records and autumn passage extended between

8th October and 25th November, with 20 in October and seven in November.

In 2013, Dusky Warblers were seen in 13 recording areas including all the most regular ones (fig. 7). These included three in Scotland and one in Wales, but only Yorkshire with nine and Norfolk with three had more than two records.

(Breeds Siberia from Ob River N to c. 60°N, E to Sea of Okhotsk, S to Russian Altai, N Mongolia & Ussuriland through NE China. Winters Nepal to S China & SE Asia to Singapore.)

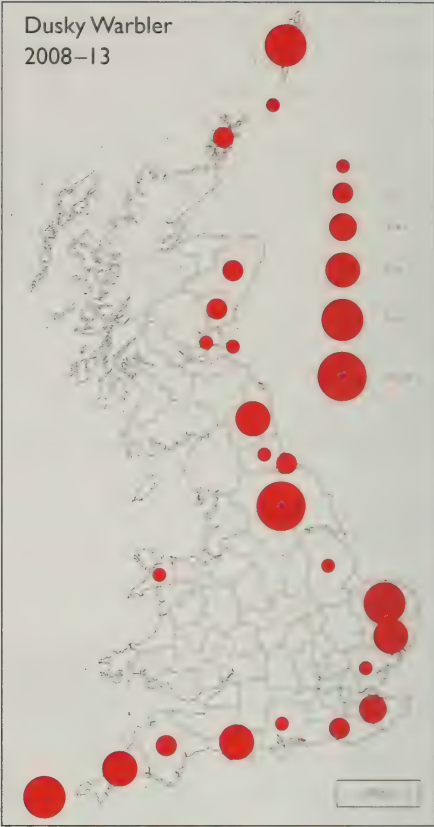


Fig. 7. Distribution of Dusky Warblers *Phylloscopus fuscatus* in Britain, 2008–13.



48. Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*, Spurn, Yorkshire, October 2013.

Graham Catley



Phil Woollen

49. ‘Siberian Chiffchaff’ *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*, Burton, Cheshire & Wirral, December 2013.

‘Siberian Chiffchaff’ *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*

Total 2008–2013	Annual mean 2008–2013	No. 2013 (rank/6)	Other annual maxima 2008–2013 (year/number/rank)		Trend 2008–2013	Annual variability 2008–2013
816	136	257 (1)	2012/147/2	2008/125/3	Uncertain	Low

Siberian Chiffchaff was added to the list of scarce migrants in 2008, to establish more clearly its status here. Although some clear patterns in distribution and timing have emerged, it is evident that reports are treated somewhat differently in the various recording areas. At one end of the spectrum, Devon requires DNA confirmation to separate *tristis/fulvescens* and *abietinus* – the 33 unconfirmed records from there in 2013 have therefore been excluded from the above figures – while at the other end some counties accept records on plumage features alone. In between, an increasing number of counties now require observers to hear the call of a suspected *tristis* before accepting the record, as suggested by Dean *et al.* (2010).

Few counties actually publish their acceptance criteria and the variation in treatment across the country makes an accurate analysis of trends very difficult. However, the figures from the past six years, not least the bumper crop of 257 in 2013, provide sufficient evidence that Siberian Chiffchaff is relatively common in some areas and not the rarity that was once thought. Birds were reported in no fewer than 28 recording areas in 2013 but, as in preceding years, the vast majority were in the Northern Isles (112 in Shetland, 41+ on Fair Isle and 11 in Orkney) and in the southwest (30 in Cornwall and 15 on Scilly; and it seems likely that the real total in Devon was high too).

Between January and March, 66 were recorded of which at least 18 had arrived in 2012 and are excluded from the 2013 total. Four appeared during April and two in May. The first of the autumn was on Fetlar (Shetland) on 27th September but the main arrival was in October and November with several remaining to the end of the year.

(Breeds Russia from Urals E to NE Siberia & S to N Mongolia. Winters Iran to N Indian subcontinent.)



Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*

Total 1968–2013	No. 2013 (rank/46)	Other annual maxima 1968–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
7,047	111 (34)	2010/398/1    2002/297/2	Increase	Moderate

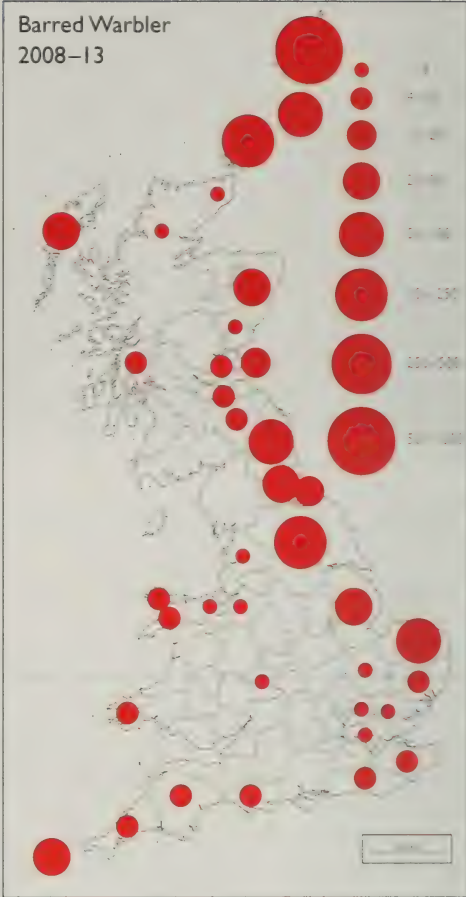
Annual means 1968–2013
1968–69 145
1970–79 143
1980–89 108
1990–99 158
2000–09 172
2010–13 240

A rather poor year produced the lowest annual total since 2000, but despite this the trend remains firmly upward. One on Holy Island (Northumberland) on 20th–21st May was an unexpected spring record – the first since 2008 and only the 19th ever. Autumn began with one on Fair Isle on 16th August but it was more than a week before the main arrival took place, in the last week of the month. The 37 in August were followed by 51 in September, 20 in October and two in November, the last sighting being on 23rd at White Sands (Lothian).

Distribution was similar to that in recent years (fig. 8) with reports coming from 18 recording areas, although fewer than usual were seen in 2013 in Orkney and Norfolk; the highest totals came from Shetland (39), Yorkshire (19) and Fair Isle (15). Three were recorded in Wales, in Anglesey and Pembrokeshire.

(Breeds C & E Europe N to S Finland & S to S Black Sea, Russia E to Yenisey River region of Siberia, & N Kazakhstan. Winters NE equatorial Africa.)

**Fig. 8.** Distribution of Barred Warblers *Sylvia nisoria* in Britain, 2008–13.



Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
701	27 (6)	1995/37/1    2008/33/2	None	Low

Annual means 1958–2013	
1958–59 2	1990–99 19
1960–69 2	2000–09 21
1970–79 5	2010–13 20
1980–89 16	

The year began with one at St Just (Cornwall), found initially on 17th November 2012, which remained until 23rd January. This is the first confirmed instance of a Subalpine Warbler wintering in Britain, since all previous records fell between March and November (N. Hudson pers. comm.).

The first of the spring appeared on 18th April with a further six in that month followed by eight in May, four in June and two in early July. Of these 21 spring birds, 12 were reported as males and five as females. The first of autumn was found at Spurn



Simon Knight

50. Male 'Eastern Subalpine Warbler' *Sylvia c. cantillans/albistriata*, Landguard, Suffolk, April 2013.

(Yorkshire) on 26th August and was followed by two in September and three in October, with the final record of the year on St Mary's (Scilly) from 24th October to 8th November.

Subalpine Warblers were seen in 13 recording areas, including four on Fair Isle, in Caernarfonshire, Pembrokeshire and Scilly, and three in Cornwall. A male at Rampside (Cumbria) on 15th–18th May was the first in northwest England since 2006.

In 2013, four records were accepted by BBRC as 'Eastern Subalpine Warbler' *S. c. cantillans/albistriata*: Fair Isle (25th May), Northumberland (4th–5th October), Shetland (24th September to 8th October) and Suffolk (26th–27th April), while there were no records of Moltoni's Warbler *S. subalpina* (Hudson *et al.* 2015). At least until 2015 (when Moltoni's Warbler was split from Subalpine Warbler), this report and statistics will continue to deal with all forms of the 'Subalpine' complex together, thus including Moltoni's.

(Breeds NW Africa & Mediterranean Basin from Portugal E to W Turkey, N to S France. Winters along S edge of Sahara from Senegal to Sudan.) Race *albistriata* breeds SE Europe from Slovenia & Croatia S to Greece, Aegean Islands, Crete & W Turkey. Migrates through Middle East to winter along S edge of Sahara S to Sudan.)

Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*

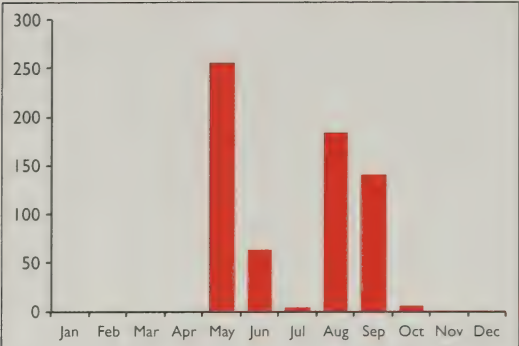
Total 1968–2013	No. 2013 (rank/46)	Other annual maxima 1968–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
4,689	113 (13)	1997/286/1    1992/281/2	None	Moderate

Annual means 1968–2013	
1968–69 35	1990–99 139
1970–79 81	2000–09 88
1980–89 104	2010–13 87

The European breeding population is described as being in moderate decline (PECBMS 2014), a description that fits the numbers of migrants appearing in Britain equally well.

The timing of arrivals in 2013 was similar to that in the past few years (fig. 9). May produced 28 records, the first on Fair Isle on 8th (the earliest ever there), followed by ten in June, of which four were reported as singing males. One was on Fair Isle on





**Fig. 9.** Arrival dates of Icterine Warblers *Hippolais icterina* in Britain by month, 2008–13.

and there were just ten individuals in the whole of southern England.

(Breeds W & C Europe N to C Fennoscandia & E to Black Sea, European Russia & Siberia E to region of Ob River, & N Kazakhstan. Winters throughout Africa S of equator.)

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*

Total 1968–2013	No. 2013 (rank/46)	Other annual maxima 1968–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
1,357	12 (44)	1981/60/1    1996/59/2	Decline	Low

Annual means 1968–2013
1968–69 15
1970–79 32
1980–89 39
1990–99 30
2000–09 23
2010–13 21



Steve Stansfield

**51.** Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta*, Bardsey, Caernarfonshire, September 2013.

The European breeding population is thought to be stable (PECBMS 2014) but migrants to Britain continue to decline, and 12 in 2013 is the lowest total since 2007. As the ten-year mean stands at 21, there is little danger of Melodious Warbler becoming genuinely rare for some time, however.

Fair Isle reported its first in spring since 1990 on 15th–16th May, while singles at Tilt Wood (Nottinghamshire) on 21st–30th June and Velator (Devon) on 5th–6th July were the only other records in the early part of the year. The next, at Pett Level (Sussex) on 27th July, was followed by two in August, four in September and one, at Land’s End (Cornwall), on 4th October. One on Bardsey (Caernarfonshire) on 18th September was the only Welsh record and the Nottinghamshire bird was the only record from an inland county. Melodious Warblers were seen in only eight recording areas, including three each for Cornwall and Dorset. The final bird of the year, at Winspit (Dorset) on 6th–9th December, was the first winter record since at least 1968.

(Breeds NW Africa & SW Europe from S Spain to SE Netherlands & E to Italy. Winters W Africa N of equator.)

Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
1,317	1 (56)	1976/102/1    1991/62/2	Large decline	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2013	
1958–59	1990–99
14	42
1960–69	2000–09
9	13
1970–79	2010–13
40	7
1980–89	
23	

Although the decline of the Aquatic Warbler in its core central European range appears to have slowed and possibly halted (BirdLife International 2015), numbers reaching Britain have continued to fall, reaching a nadir for any current scarce migrant in 2013 (the previous lowest total being two Tawny Pipits in 2007, if irruptive Parrot Crossbills are excluded). The solitary record this year came from Nanjizal (Cornwall) on 20th September. And so, from 2015, records of Aquatic Warbler will be assessed by BBRC, picking up the reins relinquished in 1982.

(Breeds locally NE Germany, Poland, Belarus & Russia E to S Urals, with isolated population in Hungary. Winters in N tropics of W Africa.)

Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*

Total 1986–2013	No. 2013 (rank/28)	Other annual maxima 1986–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
1,306	75 (3)	1992/106/1    2008/105/2	None	Moderate

Annual means 1986–2013
1986–89
30
1990–99
53
2000–09
46
2010–13
50

Although there is no significant medium-term trend in migrant Marsh Warbler numbers reaching Britain, three of the four highest annual totals have occurred in the past six years, albeit interleaved with three moderate or poor years.

Birds were reported in 18 recording areas in 2013 but concentrated in the Northern Isles (14 in Shetland, 19 on Fair Isle, five in Orkney), Yorkshire (13) and Kent (six). West-coast records were restricted to two in both Highland and the Outer Hebrides, and singles in Devon, Lancashire & N Merseyside and Caernarfonshire. There were three records in inland counties: Derbyshire, Hertfordshire and Wiltshire.

As usual, spring records predominated (fig. 10), with 15 in May (the first on 15th), and 46 in June. Fair Isle recorded its earliest ever, on 18th May. The first of the autumn appeared on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 10th July and was followed by one on Fair Isle on 27th. A further 12 were reported, almost all in the Northern Isles, until the last on 8th October; all autumn birds that were aged were juveniles or first-winter birds.

Despite its recent fortunes as a migrant, there is no sign that we shall see the Marsh Warbler return as a regular breeding bird, even though it remains an abundant breeder right up to the English Channel and North Sea coasts.

(Breeds temperate Europe from France to C Fennoscandia, E to Caucasus & NE Turkey, & Russia & Siberia E to Ob River. Winters equatorial and SE Africa.)

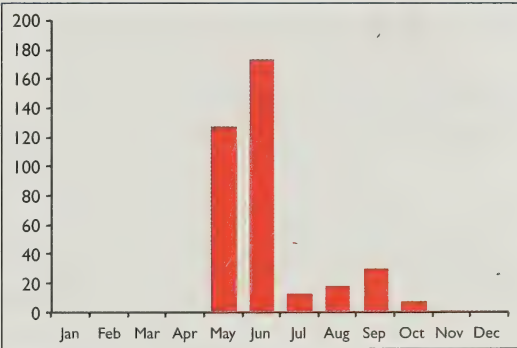


Fig. 10. Arrival dates of Marsh Warblers *Acrocephalus palustris* in Britain by month, 2008–13.



Rose-coloured Starling *Pastor roseus*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
1,063	27 (12)	2002/195/1    2001 & 2003/67/2=	None	High

Annual means 1958–2013
<u>1958–59</u> 6
<u>1960–69</u> 3
<u>1970–79</u> 6
<u>1980–89</u> 8
<u>1990–99</u> 18
<u>2000–09</u> 56
<u>2010–13</u> 37

Rose-coloured Starling was considered a national rarity until 2002, but major influxes in three years around this time resulted in its removal from the BBRC list. Since then, while numbers have been rather unremarkable, this species shows no signs of reverting to its former rarity status. High annual variability results from occasional spring and summer influxes, but the number of juveniles in autumn remains remarkably stable, averaging 17 since 2008 and varying between 14 and 22.

Two winter records were about par for the course. Both were first-winters; one remained at Exminster (Devon) from 2012 to 23rd April and the other was on St Mary’s (Scilly) from 17th December into 2014. A first-summer at Orford (Suffolk) from 23rd to 29th April was an exceptionally early migrant, the first April arrival on record, suggesting that it had wintered somewhere in western Europe. There were four in June, including one at Erbusaig (Highland) on 16th June, which just possibly accounted for further records in the region at Bettyhill and on Skye between 3rd and 31st July. Compared with recent years, this was a poor late spring/early summer showing. Three August birds included the first

juvenile on the 26th, while seven in September and ten in October were all juveniles. Rose-coloured Starlings were reported in 13 recording areas and scattered fairly evenly throughout the country, including one in the Isle of Man in June.

(Breeds locally along Black Sea coasts of Romania, S Ukraine and Turkey, E through steppe region of C Asia to E Kazakhstan. Winters Indian subcontinent S to Sri Lanka, and SE Arabian Peninsula.)

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

Total 1968–2013	No. 2013 (rank/46)	Other annual maxima 1968–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
5,300	92 (20)	1985/622/1    1981/333/2	None	Low

Annual means 1968–2013
<u>1968–69</u> 128
<u>1970–79</u> 92
<u>1980–89</u> 186
<u>1990–99</u> 116
<u>2000–09</u> 84
<u>2010–13</u> 66

This was the best year for Bluethroats in Britain since 2009 and, while numbers still appear to be declining, the medium-term trend is no longer significant.

The first ‘White-spotted Bluethroat’ *L. s. cyaneacula*, a male on the typically early date of 23rd March, was followed by another five birds seen that month and seven in April up to 11th. All of these early arrivals were presumably *cyaneacula*, although only ten were reported as such. All were found along the southern English coast with the exception of one inland at Melksham (Wiltshire) on 2nd April. The final white-spotted bird was a singing male at Martin Mere (Lancashire & N Merseyside) on 19th–21st June, reflecting the fact that wetlands are the preferred breeding habitat of this race in northern France and the Netherlands.

The first definite ‘Red-spotted Bluethroats’ appeared at three sites in Shetland and one in North-east Scotland on 10th May, and the last was on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 11th June. All the 44 records in May and June except the Lancashire bird were recorded as, or were assumed to be, nominate *svecica*.

Of these, 28 were in northern or eastern Scotland, including six on Fair Isle between 16th and 21st May and another five there during 24th–29th May. A further 14 were on the English east coast between Lincolnshire and Northumberland with just two elsewhere: at Dungeness (Kent) on 17th May and South Walney (Cumbria) on 20th.

The first returning migrant appeared at Burnham Overy (Norfolk) on 25th–27th August and was followed by 21 in September and 13 in October, the last on Fair Isle on 18th. As in spring, the majority of records (24) were in Scotland: 12 in Shetland, four in both Fair Isle and Orkney, three on the Isle of May and one in North-east Scotland. Nine of the remainder were on the English east coast, spread fairly evenly between Norfolk and Northumberland, with just two elsewhere: St Mary’s (Scilly) from 27th September to 10th October, and one found dead in Derby on 15th October.

(Red-spotted races breed from mountains of S Norway, E through Fennoscandia & Russia to extreme W Alaska, & S to C Asia. White-spotted races breed C & S Europe. Winters Mediterranean Basin, Sahel region of Africa, Arabian Peninsula, Indian subcontinent, S China & SE Asia.)

Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*

Total 1968–2013	No. 2013 (rank/46)	Other annual maxima 1968–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
4,349	192 (2)	1984/196/1    1976/174/3	None	Low

Annual means 1968–2013
1968–69 59
1970–79 79
1980–89 115
1990–99 88
2000–09 94
2010–13 118

Following on from the good showing in 2012, 2013 came very close to surpassing the record total of 1984 (although the recent tendency of an upward trend in numbers is not significant). Red-breasted Flycatchers are late arrivals in both spring and autumn. Spring passage, involving just 19 birds, took place between 8th May and 4th

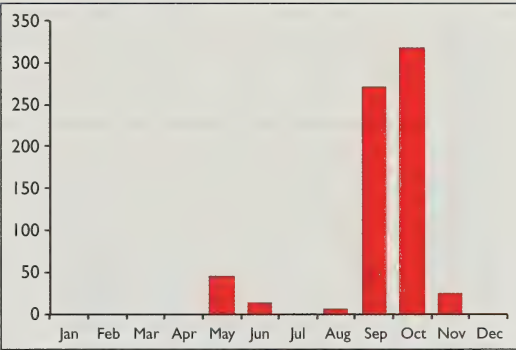


Fig. 11. Arrival dates of Red-breasted Flycatchers *Ficedula parva* in Britain by month, 2008–13.

June. Most records were on the east coast between Lincolnshire and Fair Isle; elsewhere there were just singles in Scilly and Kent. As usual the majority of records were in autumn (fig. 11). The first was seen on 24th August and a total of 173 arrived before the last on 16th November. Peak passage occurred between the last week of September and mid October, when around 90% of birds arrived. As in spring, the great majority turned up in the Northern Isles and along the east coast, including 30 in Shetland, 27 in Yorkshire, 15 in Co. Durham and 13 on Fair Isle. Good numbers also appeared in the south-west, in particular 19 on Scilly; there were also four in Cornwall, three in Devon but only one in Dorset. Six were seen in Wales including four on Bardsey (Caernarfonshire), the others in Anglesey and Pembrokeshire. Just two were seen in northwest England – in Cheshire & Wirral and Cumbria.

(Breeds C Europe from Germany N to S Sweden, C Finland & Russia E to Urals & perhaps beyond, & S to Black Sea & Caucasus.)



Roger Riddington

52. Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*, Grutness, Shetland, May 2013.



‘Grey-headed Wagtail’ *Motacilla flava thunbergi*

Total 2008–2013	Annual mean 2008–2013	No. 2013 (rank/6)	Other annual maxima 2008–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 2008–2013	Annual variability 2008–2013
277	46	30 (4)	2008/103/1    2010/52/2	Uncertain	High

‘Grey-headed Wagtails’ were reported from nine recording areas with (predictably) Shetland (10), Norfolk (9) and Fair Isle (7) being the top three. Only one was reported away from the east coast, a first-summer male at Thornton Reservoir (Leicestershire & Rutland) on 2nd–5th May. Of the 30 reported during 2013, 17 were described as males, four as females and no details were provided for the remainder. The majority (27) were recorded in spring, between 2nd and 31st May, while the three in autumn arrived between 6th September and 18th October.

(Breeds from C Fennoscandia E across N Russia & N Siberia E to Kolyma River region at least. Species winters NW Africa & throughout sub-Saharan Africa, S & SE Asia & N Australia.)

Richard’s Pipit *Anthus richardi*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
4,531	150 (5)	1994/353/1    2005/200/2	None	Low

Annual means 1958–2013
<u>1958–59</u> 6
<u>1960–69</u> 40
<u>1970–79</u> 51
<u>1980–89</u> 65
<u>1990–99</u> 130
<u>2000–09</u> 119
<u>2010–13</u> 116

With occasional exceptions, annual totals of Richard’s Pipits have been remarkably consistent for more than 20 years, and although 2013 was a good year, the numbers were nothing out of the ordinary.

It seems that overwintering may be becoming more frequent and while only small numbers are involved, eight winter records in 2013 was three more than in 2011 and 2012 combined. One in Cambridgeshire remained from 2012 until 13th January, and others were found in January in Scilly, Avon and Yorkshire, and in February in Highland and Lancashire & N Merseyside. At the end of the year, a one-day bird was in Cornwall on 3rd December and one was at Cley (Norfolk) from the 9th into 2014.

Spring produced just two records, both in April, in Anglesey and Yorkshire. The first of the autumn arrived on 19th September and while passage continued until mid November most turned up in October. There were sightings in 27 recording areas in 2013: five in Scotland, three in Wales and the remainder in England. The highest totals were Norfolk (24), Lincolnshire (21), Yorkshire (17 including 11 at Spurn) and Cornwall (14). Although a number were seen

away from the coast, there were just two reports from landlocked counties: the bird in Cambridgeshire (above) and one at Daventry (Northamptonshire) on 24th October.

(Breeds Siberia from Ob River region to Sea of Okhotsk, Mongolia, N & E China. Winters Indian subcontinent, S China & SE Asia, with small numbers locally in NW Africa, Mediterranean Basin & Arabian Peninsula.)

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
1,219	4 (55)	1992/57/1    1983/56/2	Large decline	Moderate

After yet another poor showing, Tawny Pipit will revert to being a national rarity from 2015, a decision fully justified by the four in 2013 – the only lower annual total is two in 2007. All records in 2013 are detailed below.

Annual means 1958–2013	
1958–59	1990–99
10	29
1960–69	2000–09
14	11
1970–79	2010–13
27	9
1980–89	
36	

Tawny Pipit, all records:

- 5th May, Paull Holme Strays (Yorkshire)
- 25th June, North Ronaldsay (Orkney)
- 25th September, Cuckmere Haven (Sussex)
- 26th September, Zennor (Cornwall)

(Breeds NW Africa, S & C Europe N to Estonia, E to NW Mongolia, NW China, N Iran & N Afghanistan. Winters S edge of Sahara from Senegal to Sudan, Arabian Peninsula & NW Indian subcontinent.)

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
453	22 (5)	2012/55/1 1990/43/2	Increasing after decline	High

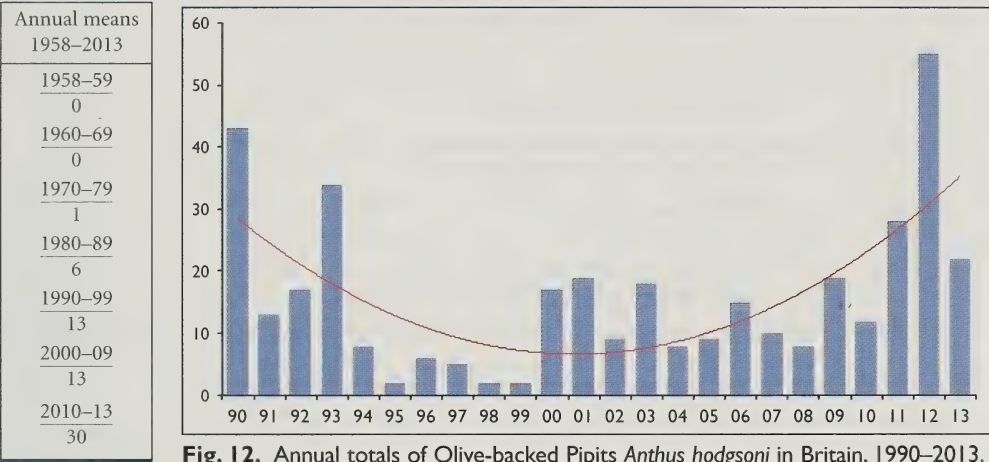


Fig. 12. Annual totals of Olive-backed Pipits *Anthus hodgsoni* in Britain, 1990–2013.



After several productive years in the early 1990s the number of Olive-backed Pipits declined significantly at the end of that decade before rising again at the start of this century. Despite this, annual variability was high and the species remained a national rarity until a more consistent upward trend emerged. This culminated in the record total of 55 in 2012, which finally resulted in its demotion from the BBRC list from 2013 (fig. 12).

On current form, however, very few county records committees are likely to have many Olive-backed Pipits to deal with as the species has one of the most concentrated geographical distributions of any scarce migrant in Britain. It has turned up in just 16 recording areas since 2008 with a heavy concentration in the Northern Isles (fig. 13). In 2013, there were sightings in just eight recording areas, and with the exception of one at Nanjizal (Cornwall) on 12th November, they were all from Lincolnshire northwards. County totals were seven in Shetland, four in both Fair Isle and Orkney, two in both Lincolnshire and Yorkshire and

Fig. 13. Distribution of Olive-backed Pipits *Anthus hodgsoni* in Britain, 2008–13.



singles in Cornwall, Co. Durham and Northumberland. Typically, most OBPs arrive in October, but there were six September arrivals, from 23rd onwards; 15 were first seen in October while the Cornish bird was the only one in November.

(Race *yunnanensis* breeds N Urals E across C & E Siberia to N China, Kamchatka, Kuril Islands & Japan. Winters widely across S China, Taiwan & throughout N & C parts of SE Asia. Nominate race breeds Himalayas & mountains of WC China, wintering throughout Indian subcontinent.)

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
499	7 (29)	1992/47/1    1995/21/2	Large decline	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2013
<u>1958–59</u> 2
<u>1960–69</u> 3
<u>1970–79</u> 7
<u>1980–89</u> 8
<u>1990–99</u> 18
<u>2000–09</u> 9
<u>2010–13</u> 12

Having been taken off the list of national rarities in 2006, Red-throated Pipit has occurred in unremarkable numbers ever since, as discussed in the last report (*Brit. Birds* 108: 213). The most recent ten-year mean is a fraction above ten and, from 2015, record assessment will revert back to BBRC. All 2013 records are listed below.

- 10th May, Spurn (Yorkshire)
- 6th October, Out Skerries (Shetland)
- 12th October, Spurn (Yorkshire)
- 12th October, Fair Isle
- 12th October, Gibraltar Point (Lincolnshire)
- 25th October, Lundy (Devon)
- 2nd November, Apex Leisure Park (Somerset)

(Breeds N Fennoscandia E to Chukotskiy Peninsula & S to Kamchatka, with small numbers W Alaska. Winters across N & C equatorial Africa, N India, S China & SE Asia.)

Common Rosefinch *Erythrina erythrina*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
4,917	201 (4)	2011/306/1    1992/248/2	None	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2013
<u>1958–59</u> 6
<u>1960–69</u> 11
<u>1970–79</u> 37
<u>1980–89</u> 76
<u>1990–99</u> 151
<u>2000–09</u> 129
<u>2010–13</u> 215

Although the European breeding population is thought to be in moderate decline (PECBMS 2014), the numbers of Common Rosefinches reaching Britain have held at least steady for 20 years or more, but with a recent increase (the figures since 2010 have included three of the four highest annual totals on record).

A female/immature at Broadstone (Dorset) from 28th January to 10th April was only the fourth wintering record in Britain since at least 1983. The previous records were individuals at Longridge (Lancashire & N Merseyside) in February 2008, Whitburn (Co. Durham) in January 2009 and Orfordness (Suffolk) in December 2012.

The first of the spring arrived on 13th May, and there were some 70 records during May and June, plus two in the first week of July. Of these spring birds, 35 were males with 19 reported as singing first-summers. Scotland accounted for 40 of the 72 spring birds, in 12 recording areas headed by 12 in Shetland, nine in Orkney and five in the Outer Hebrides. There were 23 on the east coast of England, including nine in Lincolnshire and eight in Yorkshire – all of the latter at Spurn. Singles were seen in three southern English counties, there were five birds

in four counties in Wales while one in Lancashire & N Merseyside was the only one in the northwest.

The first of the autumn appeared on Fair Isle on 19th August and was followed by a further 127 until the last, on 7th November. Their distribution was broadly similar to that of spring, although with rather more in southern England (13). The largest totals were 65 in Shetland, 16 in Orkney (all but three on North Ronaldsay), 11 on Fair Isle and eight in Yorkshire – Spurn again bagging the lion’s share of those, with seven. One at Wormwood Scrubs was a notable record for Greater London.

(Breeds N & E Europe, and locally in C Europe and Turkey, E across Russia to NE Siberia & S to Caucasus & Himalayas. Winters from Iran and Indian subcontinent to S China & Indochina.)

Arctic Redpoll *Acanthis hornemanni*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
937	32 (6)	1996/266/1    1995/195/2	None	High

Annual means 1958–2013
1958–59 0
1960–69 2
1970–79 4
1980–89 10
1990–99 60
2000–09 10
2010–13 28

Considered separately, both ‘Coues’s Arctic Redpoll’ *A. h. exilipes* and ‘Hornemann’s Arctic Redpoll’ *A. h. hornemanni* might qualify as national rarities – at present, only the latter is assessed by BBRC. The most recent ten-year means of *exilipes* and *hornemanni* are eight and ten, with more than ten recorded in only three and four of the past ten years, respectively. Relatively large influxes of both races occur from time to time but never in the same year. So 2013 was relatively unusual in that it produced reasonably good numbers of both: 18 *exilipes* (or unspecified – and for convenience, records not specified to race in 2013 are treated below as *exilipes*) and 14 *hornemanni* (accepted by BBRC). In most years, *exilipes* is the rarer of the two to reach Britain but is also prone to occasional monster invasions, resulting in a higher overall total. (Note that the combined total given in the previous report was an error; the 937 given above is correct.)

The only spring records this year were two *exilipes* at Rainham (Kent) on 23rd March and a male *hornemanni* on North Ronaldsay on 4th–7th May.

The first of autumn arrived on 21st September and all nine that month were *hornemanni*, including three at Sullom (Shetland) on 27th. A further four *hornemanni* arrived up to 15th October with none remaining after that date. All autumn records of this subspecies were in Scotland, with ten in Shetland, and singles in Orkney, Fair Isle and the Outer Hebrides.

Both the timing and the distribution of records of *exilipes* in autumn were quite different

from those of *hornemanni*. Only four were recorded in Scotland, three of them in Shetland, with the remainder along the east coast from Kent (four) to Cleveland (two), via Suffolk (one) and Norfolk (seven, of which four were together at Winterton on 13th–14th October). All but two arrived in October from 11th onwards, the exceptions being one at Dungeness (Kent) on 7th November and one at Hillwell (Shetland) on 30th December.

(Circumpolar breeding range at tree line and tundra from N Fennoscandia E to Chukotskiy Peninsula in NE Siberia, N Alaska, N Canada & N Greenland. Disperses erratically to S of breeding range in winter, regularly reaching NW Europe. Race *hornemanni* breeds Ellesmere & Baffin Island, Canada, & N Greenland S to Scorsby Sound & disperses erratically to S of breeding range in winter, irregularly reaching NW Europe.)



53. ‘Coues’s Arctic Redpoll’ *Acanthis hornemanni exilipes*, Quendale, Shetland, October 2013.

Roger Riddington



Kit Day



54. Female and male Parrot Crossbills *Loxia pytyopsittacus*, Shoeburyness, Essex, October 2013.

Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
571	89 (2)	1990/210/1    1982/84/3	None	Very high

Annual means 1958–2013
1958–59 0
1960–69 8
1970–79 1
1980–89 12
1990–99 27
2000–09 0
2010–13 22

With no records away from the Scottish breeding areas between 1995 and 2011 and just one in 2012, the influx of 2013 was quite unexpected. It was, moreover, highly concentrated, being confined to just seven counties in the south and east of England.

The first arrival was a group of four at Gunners Park, Shoeburyness (Essex), on 12th–14th October, followed by 12 in Hemsted Forest (Kent) from 15th October (until 9th December). More were found in November: seven at Stoke (Kent) on 2nd; 12 at Holt CP (Norfolk) from 11th into 2014; and 16 at Tunstall (Suffolk), from 15th November into 2014. Discoveries at inland sites continued into December, with 14 at Budby South Forest (Nottinghamshire) and 13 at May Day Farm (Suffolk) (both groups from 8th December into 2014); one at Chambers Wood Farm (Lincolnshire) on 15th–20th December; and finally ten in Ashdown Forest (Sussex), from 20th December into 2014.

(Resident or dispersive throughout N Scotland, Fennoscandia, Estonia & Russia E to Urals, with distribution closely linked to that of Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris*. Periodically disperses S & W to W Europe where occasionally breeds.)

European Serin *Serinus serinus*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
2,007	35 (28)	1996/99/1    2004/89/2	Decline	Low

It was, at best, another mediocre year for Serins in Britain. It is now ten years since more than 50 were seen and the current ten-year mean of 44 suggests a decline of around 30% since the 1990s; this is roughly in line with the current ‘moderate decline’ status of the European breeding population (PECBMS 2014).

After the first, at Porthgarra (Cornwall) on 24th March, a further 27 turned up in April, May

Annual means 1958–2013	
1958–59	1990–99
0	68
1960–69	2000–09
10	51
1970–79	2010–13
19	38
1980–89	
37	

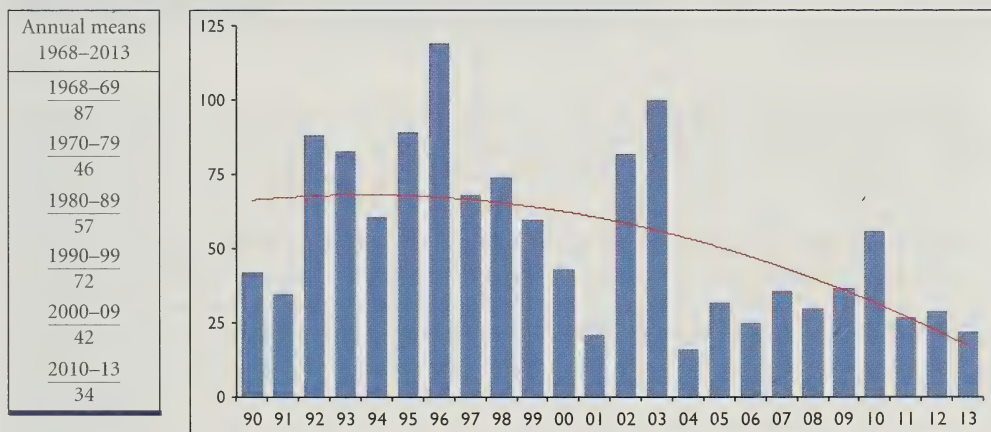
and June – a typical spring concentration. Apart from singles in Suffolk, Norfolk and Yorkshire, the rest were in southern England, with the largest totals coming from Kent (11) and Dorset (9). The first of the autumn was on Scilly, on 28th September, and October also brought just one record, in Dorset on 12th. There were three November records, on St Agnes and St Mary's (both Scilly) and at Flamborough (Yorkshire); all three were first seen or lingered into the last week of the month, and the two Scilly birds may conceivably have been the same as the two seen on St Mary's on 7th December (but these are treated as

new arrivals in the statistics).

(Breeds NW Africa, much of Mediterranean and C Europe N to c. 60°N in Estonia, Turkey, Cyprus and Israel. Northern breeders winter in Mediterranean Basin.)

## Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*

Total 1968–2013	No. 2013 (rank/46)	Other annual maxima 1968–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
2,483	22 (44)	1996/119/1    1969/114/2	Large decline	Moderate



**Fig. 14.** Annual totals of Ortolan Buntings *Emberiza hortulana* in Britain, 1990–2013.

The European breeding population of Ortolan Bunting is thought to be in steep decline (PECBMS 2014); if the decline continues at its present rate, the species may fall below the threshold set to define national rarities sometime after 2020. It is always dangerous to predict future events from current trends, but there is no sign of the decline levelling off, and the present ten-year mean stands at just 31.

Annual totals have exceeded the 1990s average on only two occasions this century, a period during which eight of the ten lowest totals have been recorded (2013 being the third lowest; fig. 14). As numbers have declined, so the distribution has contracted – Ortolan Buntings were reported from just nine recording areas in 2013, compared with 29 during 2008–12. Dorset was the top county, with eight records, including four at Portland Bill on 5th–7th September. Elsewhere, there were three in both Shetland and Yorkshire, two in both Fair Isle and Scilly, and singles in Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Kent and Northumberland.

There were five records in May, from 8th onwards, and one on Fair Isle on 10th–14th June. The first five autumn birds arrived in the last week of August, ten followed during September and one was on St Mary's (Scilly) on 24th–28th October.

(Breeds Europe from C Spain to C Fennoscandia, E across C Russia to Baikal region, and Turkey E to N Kazakhstan. Winters across N & C equatorial Africa.)



Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
1,209	64 (1)	2000/59/2    2005/55/3	None	Low

Annual means 1958–2013	
1958–59	1990–99
5	30
1960–69	2000–09
5	33
1970–79	2010–13
10	47
1980–89	
24	

It was a record year for Little Buntings in Britain and, in contrast to the two previous species, numbers appear to be on the increase in the short-term, although there is no significant medium-term trend.

Six were recorded in spring, although at least two may have been overwintering birds: at Rawcliffe Moss (Lancashire & N Merseyside) from 13th March to 30th April, and Elba Park (Co. Durham) on 8th–23rd April, which is assumed to have been the bird seen there in November 2012. One at Lowsey Thorn (Somerset) on the early date of 5th March had perhaps also wintered locally. The other spring records were singles in Dorset and Lincolnshire in April and on Unst (Shetland) on 28th May.

Autumn produced 59 records between 10th September and 28th November, all but three arriving in September and October. More than half were in the Northern Isles with 21 in Shetland, ten on Fair Isle and three in Orkney. Elsewhere, seven in Yorkshire was the largest English total, while five on Scilly was the only noteworthy total in the south. Records from less familiar sites included the first record for Cambridgeshire, at Dunkirk on 6th October, and one on Barra (Outer Hebrides) on 22nd October.

(Breeds N Eurasia from N Fennoscandia E to the Chukotskiy Peninsula & Sea of Okhotsk in E Siberia. Winters NE India to S China, S to N Thailand & N Indochina.)



John Malloy

55. Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*, New Lambton, Co. Durham, April 2013.

Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*

Total 1958–2013	No. 2013 (rank/56)	Other annual maxima 1958–2013 (year/number/rank)	Trend 1990–2013	Annual variability 2000–2013
497	10 (15=)	1993/50/1    1998/41/2	Decline	Moderate

Annual means 1958–2013	
1958–59	1990–99
3	20
1960–69	2000–09
3	8
1970–79	2010–13
6	9
1980–89	
8	

Rustic Bunting has been undergoing a gradual but steady decline since 2000, and it will be returned to the BBRC fold from the beginning of 2015. The ten-year mean currently stands at eight. All 2013 records are detailed below; all five of the spring birds were reported as males. As for the other species reverting to the BBRC from 2015 (Aquatic Warbler, Tawny and Red-throated Pipit), a full summary of recent records will be included in the next scarce migrants report.

## Rustic Bunting, all records:

19th May, Fair Isle  
19th May, Holy Island (Northumberland)  
20th May, Ham, Foula (Shetland)  
28th–29th May, Ham, Foula (Shetland)  
3rd June, Fair Isle  
27th September, Whitburn CP (Co. Durham)  
3rd October, Pyes Hall (Lincolnshire)  
8th–9th October, Feal Burn, Fetlar (Shetland)  
12th–15th October, Flamborough (Yorkshire)  
1st–3rd November, Cove (North-east Scotland)

(Breeds N Eurasia from C Fennoscandia E across N Russia to E Siberia & Kamchatka, & S to Baikal region. Migrates SE to winter E China, Korean Peninsula & S Japan.)

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## Acknowledgments

Thanks are due to all the county recorders and others who sent in records and, of course, the many birders who submitted their records for publication in county bird reports, without whom none of this would have been possible. The role of county recorders and local records committees is absolutely vital in ensuring that reports are scrutinised and that only confirmed records make it to publication. The BirdGuides database proved invaluable in filling gaps in records received, and special thanks are due to the Scottish Birds Records Committee and the Welsh Records Panel who adjudicate records in their respective countries of most of the species considered here; their publications can be accessed at [www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/records-committee](http://www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/records-committee) and [www.birdsinwales.org.uk/rare/wrp.htm](http://www.birdsinwales.org.uk/rare/wrp.htm)

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## Appendix 1. Additional and corrected records.

When dealing with around 5,000 records a year it is inevitable that some errors creep in and we are grateful to those recorders who have contacted us to correct them. Most commonly, these involve records that were not received by recorders in time to be included in the reports and, less frequently, those that were published when they had not been validated by the relevant records committee. There is not space to publish all corrections but those felt to be most significant are listed below (they are additional records unless stated otherwise).

### Dorset

Grey-headed Wagtail: male, Portland, 20th May 2011.

### Norfolk

Dusky Warbler: Holkham, 1st May 2011; this record was not confirmed.

### Shetland

Greenish Warbler: Norwick, Unst, 23rd–24th September 2012.

Dusky Warbler: Swinster Burn, Sandwick, 19th October 2012.



## Boxing clever: the value of nestboxes to bird conservation

The latest review of Birds of Conservation Concern (Eaton *et al.* 2015) made us reflect on the role that nestboxes have played in bird conservation, a subject on which surprisingly little has been published, though there is a helpful chapter in Dicks *et al.* (2013).

Did a nestbox programme help the Barn Owl *Tyto alba*, which is now on the Green List? (And are Barn Owl boxes helping Amber-listed Common Goldeneyes *Bucephala clangula*, Stock Doves *Columba oenas*, Tawny Owls *Strix aluco* and Common Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus*?). And will nestboxes help Common Swifts *Apus apus* move from the Amber list to the Green list now that successful initiatives for this species are operating throughout Britain (see [actionforswifts.blogspot.com](http://actionforswifts.blogspot.com); <http://swift-conservation.org/news.htm>)? Of course, nestboxes by themselves are not a conservation solution – life is never that simple – but a review of the role that nestboxes have played in bird conservation in Britain (and around the world) would be valuable, especially if it prompted research into the most effective designs.

How long have nestboxes been part of our conservation armoury? One of the earliest references available, alluded to in the recent BoCC4 report (Brit. Birds 108: 741), is in a fascinating RSPB leaflet published in *Bird Notes and News* 1908/09 (fig. 1), where, among other species, there are two boxes recommended for the Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, now sadly no longer a British breeding bird.

Little has changed in those designs over the past century, but some attitudes have. In 1971 RFP held a meeting at the RSPB head-

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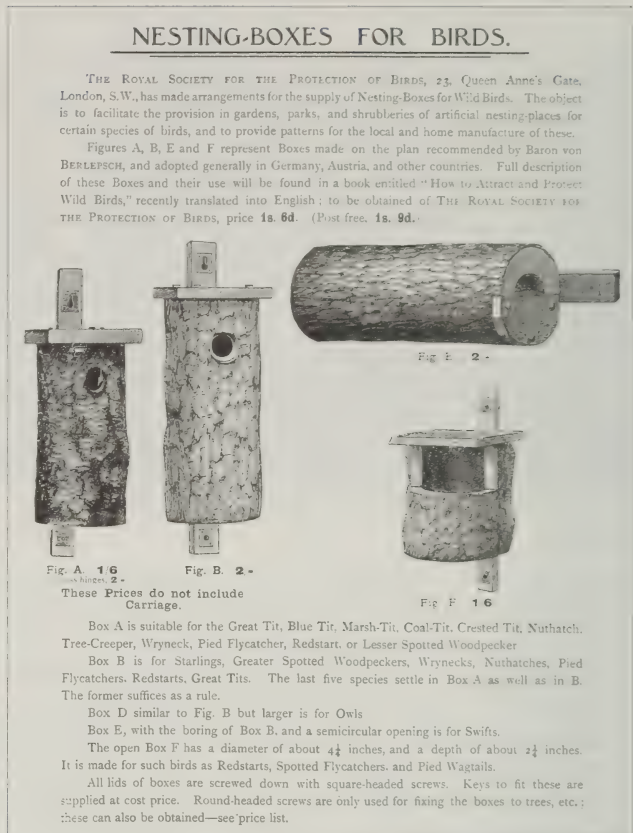


Fig. 1. RSPB leaflet published in *Bird Notes and News*, 1908/09.

quarters to discuss nextbox design to help deter Tree Sparrows *Passer montanus* from nestboxes in The Lodge reserve as they were preventing Great Tits *Parus major* from nesting...

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## Light pollution

I was interested to read Martin Woodcock's *BB* eye about the effect of light pollution at night on birds (*Brit. Birds* 108: 642–643). I have often thought it strange that more is not said and written about the numerous bird fatalities caused by flying into lighted buildings at night, while so much is made of deaths from birds flying into wind turbines. It is true that if windfarms are poorly sited,

casualties and disturbance to nesting birds will result, yet while wind turbines produce the type of renewable electricity we need if we are to move to a low carbon future, buildings lit all night are doing nothing but wasting electricity and contributing to climate change. Please, let's start a British version of FLAP ([www.flap.org](http://www.flap.org)) and get those lights turned out.

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## Field guides

The 'official' history of field guides (see Nigel Redman's *BB* eye, *Brit. Birds* 108: 558–560) is actually at least 86 years old. Roger Peterson told me that his original model was W. B. Alexander's *Birds of the Ocean* of 1928. Alexander told me that this was originally commissioned from Robert Cushman Murphy at the American Museum of Natural History, who delegated it to him when he

passed by on his way back to England from Australia, and provided assistance. Actually, there might have been an earlier British version since Edward Wilson drafted a good guide to seabirds (now, I think, in the Alexander Library) for his trips south, but sadly he failed to return from a visit to the South Pole.

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## Bird literature in other languages

Catriona Morrison put together an excellent review of the latest atlas of German ringing recoveries (*Brit. Birds* 108: 359–360), and does a great service in drawing our attention to the wealth of ornithological literature published in German. Yet this volume (Bairlein *et al.* 2014) is not quite 'the first migration atlas to be published using German ringing and recovery data since 1931'. In 1973, Gerhardt Zink, under the auspices of Radolfzell Bird Observatory and the Max Planck Institute, published Vol. 1 of his atlas of ringing recoveries of European passerines. This volume of wonderful maps had the disadvantage of being loose-leafed and came in a softback box (mine is already disintegrating) to hold the numerous pages. Vol. 2 followed in 1975, and was more robustly

bound, but again in paperback; Vols. 3–5 duly appeared, in 1981, 1985 and 1995 (the last co-edited by Franz Bairlein; Zink 1973–85, Zink & Bairlein 1995). Although these volumes covered only passerines, they did mark major advances in European ornithology, and deserve to be better known.

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# Obituary

## Norman Winfrid Moore (1923–2015)

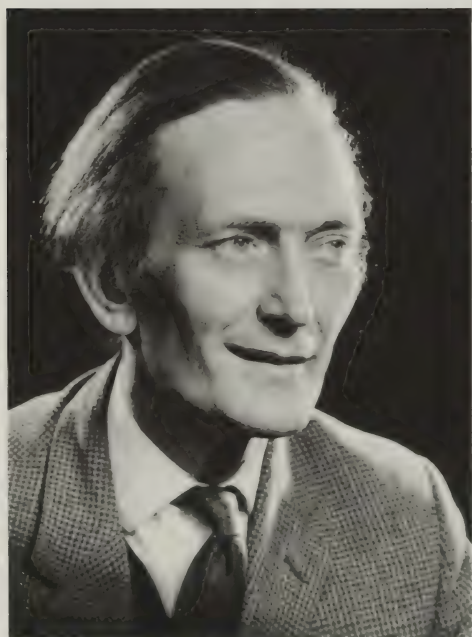
Norman Moore died on 21st October 2015 at the age of 92. Older ornithologists in Britain will remember him with great affection as one of the most visionary and influential conservationists of the twentieth century. Working mainly behind the scenes, he played a key role in the development of the Nature Conservancy in Britain, and for many years headed the Toxic Chemicals and Wildlife Section at Monks Wood Experimental Station, near Huntingdon. At a time of highly destructive agricultural policy, he was a founder member of the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), whose aims were to find practical ways of conserving wildlife on working farms and to bring farmers and conservationists closer together. Among his many accomplishments, he was one of the first to realise the adverse effects of habitat fragmentation on fauna and flora, one of the first to study hedgerows and their importance as havens for wild plants and animals on modern farmland, and one of the first to recognise the importance of pesticides in destroying wildlife. His research group at Monks Wood was highly productive, and his

younger colleagues included Derek Ratcliffe and Ian Prestt, who were later to become leaders in their own right, the latter as Chief Executive of the RSPB.

Norman Moore was born in 1923, the son of a medical doctor. He was brought up in rural Sussex, where his passion for natural history developed. He was educated at Eton College and then at Trinity College Cambridge. He served during the Second World War as a gunner, suffered a serious leg wound and spent a period in a prisoner of war camp, one of only four British among many thousands of Russians. After the war and recovery in a French hospital, he returned to Cambridge, and then took up a post in Bristol as a lecturer in zoology, during which time he worked for his PhD. In 1953, he was appointed Regional Officer for southwest England in the newly formed Nature Conservancy, within which and its successor body, the Nature Conservancy Council, he spent his whole working life. When he retired in 1983, he became the first person in Britain to have spent an entire career in conservation: on research, planning and diplomacy.

With the help of the BTO, in 1954 Norman organised a nationwide survey of the Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*, whose major prey species, the Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, had been drastically reduced by myxomatosis. His groundbreaking paper, 'The past and present status of the Buzzard in the British Isles', published in *BB* in 1957 (*Brit. Birds* 50: 173–197), presented two maps side by side. One map showed the density of Buzzards in different parts of Britain, while the other showed the densities of gamekeepers in different parts of Britain. The one was a mirror image of the other, hinting strongly at what was the major factor limiting Buzzard numbers in Britain at that time.

Norman had wide interests in natural history beyond birds, and became a leading expert on dragonflies, the subject of his PhD at Bristol University. Later in life, he was part-author of the 'New Naturalist' *Dragon-*



56. Norman Moore in 1980.

*flies* published in 1960, and later also of the 'New Naturalist' *Hedgerows*, published in 1974. His two later books, *A Bird of Time* (1987) and *Oaks, Dragonflies and People* (2002), were more autobiographical, and in the first he argued the case for nature conservation as an underlying principle of wise land use. Among other awards, he received the British Ornithologists' Union Medal for his work on pesticides (1972), the Zoological Society's Stamford Raffles Prize for 'distinguished contributions to the ecology and behaviour of dragonflies' (2001), and the Royal Entomological Society's Marsh Award

for Insect Conservation (2002).

Highly competent, well educated and deep-thinking, Norman was an extremely kind man, well known for his gentle manner, modesty and diplomacy. Always busy, he had time for everyone. He was loved by all who worked with him, a great ambassador for conservation through a period when, under government policy, so many of Britain's wild places were being destroyed by rampant agriculture and forestry. He will be remembered fondly and respectfully by all who knew him.

*Ian Newton*

## Notes

### Whooper Swan associating with breeding Mute Swans

Plate 57 was taken in Cambridgeshire, between Wicken Fen and Burwell Fen just outside Upware, on 17th May 2015. It shows a pair of nesting Mute Swans *Cygnus olor* with an attendant Whooper Swan *C. cygnus*, which the pair of Mutes seemed quite happy to tolerate. I first noticed the Whooper on 15th May, and on each of the three consecutive days I saw the birds, the Whooper was noticeably more wary than the Mutes. The female Mute sat tight on the nest, presumably on a clutch, while the male, although not aggressive, made his presence felt if I approached too close in my boat. I was not able to visit the site later in the spring,

to see whether the Whooper Swan remained in the area, or whether the Mute Swans bred successfully.

**Acknowledgment** Thanks to Kirsie Peck for her comments and for encouraging submission of this note.



**57.** Mute Swans *Cygnus olor* with attendant Whooper Swan *C. cygnus*, Cambridgeshire, May 2015.

Kelvin Lock

*Kelvin Lock, e-mail jkl.lock@ntlworld.com*

**Editorial comment** In 1997, we published a note describing a similar situation with a lone Canada Goose *Branta canadensis* and a pair of Mute Swans. In this case also, the swans tolerated the Canada Goose, which at times was seen on the nest beside the female swan. Malcolm Ogilvie commented at the time that such attachments by a lone bird of one species to a pair of other species are not uncommon in captive wildfowl. It is not known whether the Whooper Swan observed by Kelvin Lock was of captive origin or an injured wild bird (there was no obvious injury).



## Backyard Tysties

Black Guillemots *Cephus grylle* are renowned for their opportunistic breeding in a variety of odd places. Although they normally breed along rocky coasts with holes and crevices, they also utilise a variety of man-made structures, from purpose-built nestboxes and holes in harbour walls to tideline debris, such as fish-boxes (see, for

example, Cramp 1985). My own Black Guillemot study area is in Bangor, Co. Down, where a variety of holes are used each year (Greenwood 2015). With an ever-increasing Black Guillemot population in Bangor, the birds seek new breeding sites. In 2010, a resident of a house on the seafront in Bangor realised that Black Guillemots were breeding

under decking that during high tide protruded over the water and at low tide hung over the rocky shore, some 6 m below the decking (plate 58).

Recently, the decked area required replacing. After the breeding season in 2011, the decking planks were replaced, in such a way that Black Guillemots could obtain easy access beneath the decking from the sea as previously. In addition, an inspection hatch was incorporated into the design so that a small section of decking could be lifted and the progress of the two breeding cavities assessed (plate 59). These cavities have produced offspring in each subsequent year.

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**58 & 59.** The decked canopy hangs out over rocks at low tide and over water at high tide. The breeding cavities are accessed by Black Guillemots *Cephus grylle* beneath the decking where it runs into the supporting wall (above, July 2015). Below, the house owner sitting beside the hole in the decking that allows access to the breeding cavity beneath (July 2014).

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## Turtle Dove mobbed by Meadow Pipits and Jackdaws

On 21st May 2015 at about 12.30 hrs, I saw a Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* on a telegraph wire next to Cley Marshes reserve, in Norfolk. As it was the first I have seen in Cley for several years, I stopped to look at it and take a photograph (plate 60). When the dove flew off, it was immediately mobbed by two Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis*, which were almost certainly nesting nearby. The dove then flew across a grazing meadow, when four Jackdaws *Corvus monedula* feeding in

the field got up and chased it until it had disappeared south over Cley village.

I have never knowingly witnessed the mobbing of a Turtle Dove abroad, nor when they were much commoner in England. I can only assume that this behaviour was because neither the Meadow Pipits nor the Jackdaws recognised it and so treated it as a potential predator with its somewhat Cuckoo-like *Cuculus canorus* appearance and fast, somewhat falcon-like, flight.

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**Editorial comment** An earlier note (*Brit. Birds* 77: 425) recorded the reaction of a flock of Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* to two Turtle Doves. Since Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto* are quite often mobbed or chased (for example by hirundines), it is perhaps surprising that there are not more records of Turtle Doves being mobbed.



Richard Porter

60. Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* and Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*, Cley, Norfolk, May 2015.

## Eurasian Jay's mimicry of Tawny Owl to deter Carrion Crow

At about 15.20 hrs on 18th June 2015, I noted some unusual vocalisations from the Eurasian Jays *Garrulus glandarius* that were provisioning a nest near to my garden in north Cambridgeshire. As well as the more familiar screeching, I heard what sounded like the soft hooting of a Tawny Owl *Strix aluco*. Knowing that Jays are proficient mimics, including in certain threat situations, I tried to establish whether the Jay or indeed a Tawny Owl was making these sounds, and for what reason. A second Jay arrived on the scene, and seconds later a Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* flew out

of the tall Norway Spruce *Picea abies* in which all three birds were perched. The Jays pursued the crow, and the 'owl' calls continued, among other calls, from one or both of the Jays, which had landed in clear sight in a dead elm *Ulmus procera*, until my further approach put the crow to flight. The crow may not have been unsettled by the call, given that the producer(s) were in full view, and I saw no evidence that it was having a deterrent effect. It may be significant that a range of calls were being uttered by the Jays, or perhaps 'tried out' as a response to a stressful situation.

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## Male Blackbird brooding young

In March 2015, a Blackbird *Turdus merula* nested in a beech *Fagus* hedge adjacent to the study window of our house, which is in a remote setting on the lower slopes of Dartmoor, Devon, about 100 m above sea level. After the eggs hatched, we noticed that the male was feeding the chicks on a regular basis, but also brooding the young, which is contrary to much of the literature (e.g. *BWP*), which states that only the female broods the chicks. However, we saw the male brooding quite regularly, although the female was definitely 'in charge' and took over as soon as she returned after foraging.

As soon as the eggs hatched, the male began to take an equal part in the feeding and removal of faecal sacs etc. (he was not seen near the nest during building/laying/incubation). If present, the female

would certainly be the brooder of choice (and the male always deferred), but neither parent brooded for any length of time during the day (estimated maximum five minutes). At dusk, the female was always on the nest with the male absent but presumably nearby.

A short video of the behaviour is available at <https://youtu.be/FmS2B3GknSY>. This shows fairly typical behaviour: the male would arrive with worms, feed the chicks, clear out faecal sacs by eating them; then either depart on another foraging trip or brood the young until the female reappeared. The chicks hatched on 10th or 11th April, so would have been no more than a couple of days old at this stage. Both parents cared for the young until they fledged.

**Acknowledgment** Thanks to Ian Haywood for his comments and for encouraging submission of this note.

Kerry and Sharon Lord, Devon; e-mail [kerry@lordfamily.co.uk](mailto:kerry@lordfamily.co.uk)

**Editorial comment** This behaviour has been recorded before (see *Brit. Birds* 93: 399) but is clearly unusual, and the context and duration of male brooding in the instance recorded by Kerry and Sharon Lord differ from the earlier example.

## Common Chaffinch feeding young House Sparrows



In late July 2015, I noticed a male Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* feeding repeatedly on sunflower hearts at a feeder in my garden in Crosby. From the feeder, it would fly back to the cover of a large Ivy *Hedera helix* bush. This behaviour was observed over several days before I discovered that the Chaffinch was feeding two juvenile House Sparrows *Passer domesticus* (plate 61). At this point, it became clear that there were two male Chaffinches in attendance, although at no point did I observe both feeding the House Sparrow chicks at the same time, so it is unclear whether one or both were involved in feeding the sparrows.

**61.** Male Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* feeding juvenile House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*, Crosby, Liverpool, July 2015.

Philip H. N. Collins, 41 York Avenue, Crosby, Liverpool L23 5RN

**Editorial comment** This observation recalls a note describing a male Chaffinch feeding a brood of young Hawfinches *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* on three or four occasions in London in 1954 (*Brit. Birds* 74: 151).

# Reviews

## Birding Frontiers Challenge Series: Winter

By Martin Garner

Privately published, 2015

Pbk, 132pp; colour illustrations and photos, line-drawings and maps

ISBN 978-0-9929757-1-5, *BB Bookshop* price £24.99

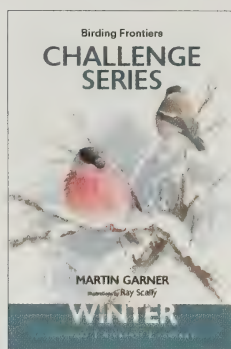
Identification challenges affect every birder to a greater or lesser extent. For most, they are an essential part of the learning process, helping us all to become better birders. In recent years, I have begun to wonder if there was that much more left to learn about British and European birds. But even in our own backyard there is still more to discover, and not just about the minutiae. Martin Garner has championed this for years, challenging us to push boundaries and ask questions.

The volume being reviewed here is the second in the series. The first, *Autumn*, was published in 2014 (see *Brit. Birds* 107: 777). The premise and format of this second volume is exactly the same as the first. Each chapter looks in detail at a group of similar and potentially confusable species (or subspecies). For each group there is an initial overview of the taxa involved and their problems, together with short sections on fieldcraft and ageing and sexing. This is followed by double-page spreads of the various taxa. The birds are illustrated both by superb colour drawings by Ray Scally, annotated to highlight key features, and a series of colour photographs. Line-drawings, sonograms and maps are also included where needed. The texts usually begin with a personal introduction covering the author's experience with the species or subspecies concerned. This is followed by sections on vagrancy potential/occurrence patterns, taxonomy, and key ID points (in winter, as that's the subject of this volume). The text is succinct, often in short, numbered sections, and is thus easy to digest. QR codes are also provided, enabling the reader to access a dedicated website via a smartphone or tablet, which gives further information including sounds and video clips.

So what does this new volume contain? There are 15 chapters (compared with 18 in the first) covering eiders, Black Guillemots, large auks, Turtle Doves, Barn Owls, hierofalcons, Peregrines, grey shrikes, Redwings, large pipits, Water Pipits, Buff-bellied Pipits, Bullfinches, redpolls, and Snow Buntings. Taking some of the groups that appealed to me most, I found that the eiders chapter

extended to 12 pages and covered the five sometimes identifiable races of Common Eider *Somateria mollissima* (especially males), which include Faeroe *S. m. faeroeensis*, Northern *S. m. borealis*, Dresser's *S. m. dresseri* and Pacific Eiders *S. m. v-nigrum*, in addition to our own nominate race; all have occurred in the Western Palearctic at least once. The treatment is thorough and a good summary of current knowledge. The redpolls section is even more impressive, running to 16 pages and covering all the plumages of the six taxa that potentially occur in Britain. It's a lot more information than you can get in a field guide, even the wonderful *Collins Bird Guide*. The pipits are well treated too, in three chapters. Richard's *Anthus richardi* and Blyth's *A. godlewskii* get six pages and the two Buff-bellied Pipits (tentatively treated as a single species *A. rubescens* here) get another six pages. As for the Water Pipit *A. spinoletta* complex, there is some evidence to suggest that the three races should be treated separately (see *Brit. Birds* 108: 42–48), and while it may be premature this book has taken the plunge and has done just that. And it tells you how to tell them apart. Grey shrikes are another challenging group in which taxonomy is in a state of flux. Five taxa are treated by Garner, four of which have not occurred in Britain (yet). Northern Shrike *Lanius borealis* is treated as a separate species from Great Grey *L. excubitor*, although the book does not cover 'Steppe Grey Shrike' *L. meridionalis pallidirostris*, which is more likely to be seen in autumn rather than winter.

Although the Challenge Series is an initiative set up by and brought together by Martin Garner, it should be pointed out that the work is a team effort incorporating the latest advances in field identification. Many leading ornithologists have contributed to this book and they are duly credited in each chapter. But Garner's enthusiasm, and his unending quest for knowledge, shines through on





every page. The style is a little too chatty in places for my taste, perhaps brimming with just a bit too much self-confidence. I also noticed a number of typographical errors, but these minor distractions do not detract from what is another great addition to the birding literature. The concept of comparing similar and confusing taxa is not new, but

in this particular series it is very well executed. This is a book that anyone who is serious about their birding will want – there is a lot of information here and it's very handy to have it all in one place, in such an attractive package.

*Nigel Redman*

### The Peregrines of Norwich Cathedral

By Robin Chittenden; Red Hare Publishing, 2015;

Pbk, 48pp; many colour photographs

ISBN 978-1-910001-18-9

RRP £19.99, BB Bookshop price £14.49 incl. P&P

As its name suggests, this book is about the Peregrine Falcons *Falco peregrinus* that have nested on Norwich Cathedral since at least 2011, when a suitable platform was installed. The book consists mainly of photographs taken by the author, with a minimum of text and no quantitative data of any kind. The images are excellent and well reproduced, depicting perching and flying adult and juvenile Peregrines, together with several pictures of the cathedral and its stained glass windows. Although I enjoyed looking through the pictures,

the RRP seems expensive to me, considering that for a roughly similar price I could buy a copy of Peter Dare's 220-page book *The Life of Buzzards*, or Jeremy Pursglove's 397-page book *Taming the Flood*, to mention two good books reviewed recently in *BB* (but see the bookshop price above).

*Ian Newton*



### Otters in Shetland: the tale of the 'draatsi'

By Richard Shucksmith and Brydon Thomason

The Shetland Times, 2015

Hbk, 276pp, 220 colour photographs

ISBN 978-1-910997-00-0

BB Bookshop price £31.99 incl. P&P

This, quite simply, is a fabulous book. Visually stunning, engaging and informative it describes the ecology of Otters *Lutra lutra* in Shetland through a series of captioned photographs which, even by today's high standards, are exceptional. It covers a range of topics: diet, feeding ecology, breeding, communication, home ranges, life expectancy, mortality, and much more. The two authors love nothing better than being in the field and it is apparent that they have made an enormous effort to secure the images needed to tell the story. There is even a series of underwater shots of Otters and their key prey species. Six short essays describe some of the authors' favourite encounters with Otters, while a section on their history in Shetland (some people may be surprised to hear

that they were introduced to the islands) includes interviews with Otter trappers active in the 1950s and 60s. Perhaps surprisingly, this section fails to mention that the Yell Sound Coast is a Special Area of Conservation in Shetland, classified because of its Otter population. The text is generally well written, although the photograph-led approach inevitably leads to a degree of repetition. The authors deserve a huge amount of praise for this remarkable book, which is a must-buy for those interested in Otters or Shetland – I cannot recommend it highly enough.

*Paul Harvey*



## The New Birds of Kazakhstan

By Arend Wassink

Privately published, De Cocksdorp, Texel, 2015

Hbk, 382pp; many colour photographs, illustrations and maps

ISBN 978-90-811462-0-3, **BB Bookshop** price £42.99

In the eight years since publication of *The Birds of Kazakhstan* (Wassink & Oreel, see *Brit. Birds* 101: 160), much has been discovered about the status and distribution of birds in Kazakhstan. This complete update of the original volume brings this new information together in a larger format, with 96 additional pages, many more photographs and vastly improved distribution maps. The artwork by Szabolcz Kóczy is superb (his male White-browed Tit-warbler *Leptopoeile sophiae* glows on the page), while illustrations by Ruud van Beusekom and Martin Eccles make up the remainder. Numerous half-page colour photographs of many of Kazakhstan's most iconic and sought-after species further enhance this book.

The 30 introductory pages provide a summary of the geography, climate, and the biomes, ecoregions and habitats found in Kazakhstan, many of which are illustrated with colour photographs. Other chapters discuss environmental threats and conservation measures, the structure of the avifauna, migration through the country, and the systematics and taxonomy adopted – which generally follows the IOC world bird list apart from 13 listed exceptions, most of which merge subspecies recognised by IOC, and only two (Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* and Shore Lark *Eremophila alpestris*) result in additional species – each becoming three species.

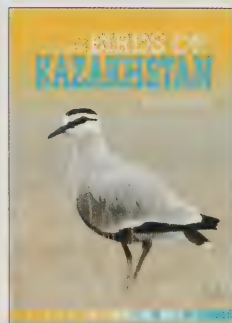
Much of the remainder of the book provides individual accounts of the 499 species recorded up to September 2015. For regularly occurring species and distinctive subspecies, these include a range map, a

short summary of the status, habitat preference, breeding and non-breeding distributions and migration pattern. Regular

passage migrants receive similarly thorough treatment, while for vagrants just the date and location of the first nine records are given. For many readers, the maps will be the most useful and interesting aspect of this book: they show the major biogeographical zones within the country, and the resident, breeding, wintering and migrating ranges, while a series of symbols provide additional data or denote specific records. Every species has its own map, while each subspecies also has an individual map that shows where vagrant races have occurred. These maps provide the most accurate understanding of species ranges within the country and are a huge improvement on those in the original guide.

All relevant localities in Kazakhstan are detailed in a gazetteer, and the bibliography extends to 29 pages, undoubtedly the most complete and up to date available in English, although the majority refer to publications in Russian. This book is indispensable for anyone tempted by the exciting birding that Kazakhstan offers. And adventurous Western Palearctic listers may be intrigued by a handful of species that just make it west of the Ural River.

*Peter Kennerley*



## A Field Guide to the Birds of Kazakhstan (in Russian)

By Vadim K. Ryabitsev, Anatoly F. Kovshar, Victoria A. Kovshar and

Nikolay N. Berezovikov

Menzbier Ornithological Society and Kazakhstan Birds Conservation Union, 2014

Hbk, 512pp; 122 colour plates, many photographs and maps

ISBN 978-601-7287-15-3, currently available only in Kazakhstan for

Tg 5000 (c. £12 or €15)

This is the first fully illustrated field guide to the birds of Kazakhstan. Aside from an introduction and index in English, the remainder of the text is in Russian, which limits its appeal for those who

lack a basic understanding of the language. The first half of the book comprises 122 colour plates, which include three or four species per plate, and accompanying individual summary accounts and





maps placed opposite each plate. These accounts are brief – even the taxonomically complex shrikes and wagtails receive no more than six lines – but they do make mention of each race that occurs within the country, some of which will be unfamiliar to those brought up on western taxonomy. A distribution map for each species illustrates the breeding, wintering, passage and resident ranges, while a red diamond denotes the locations where rarities have occurred.

A range of plumages for 500 species are illustrated by the famous Russian ornithologist Vadim Ryabitsev, including some downy chicks along with juvenile and a range of adult plumages. While perhaps not up to the standard of some of the modern field guides for the Western Palearctic, they are more than adequate to enable all likely species to be identified (except, perhaps, for some of the *Calandrella* larks). A further 28 vagrants to Kazakhstan are given shorter accounts and one or two

illustrations. In addition to the plates, numerous colour photographs appear throughout the text.

The remaining 197 pages are devoted to detailed accounts of every species, with a description of the habitat, field characters including identification of adult and immature plumages, differences from similar species and a description of vocalisations. The taxonomy adopted here is that used by the Russian authorities, so although it is very similar to that used in Europe, there are some differences, for example Cinereous Bullfinch *Pyrrhula cineracea* is split from Bullfinch *P. pyrrhula*, whereas the stonechats remain a single species *S. torquata*. There is a brief bibliography of Russian and European sources.

This book is certain to add to the growing interest in birds and conservation in Kazakhstan and the Russian-speaking nations of Central Asia.

Peter Kennerley

## Where to Watch Birds in Northern France

By Quentin Dupriez

Delachaux & Niestlé SA, 2015

Pbk, 205pp; black-and-white photographs, line-drawings

ISBN 978-2-603-02180-4, €19.00

The combined region of Nord – Pas-de-Calais covers an area that is slightly larger than Kent, the nearest English county – just 33 km away. It hugs the coast of France from the border with Belgium southwards for about 120 km, and extends inland for about 200 km. Details are provided for 38 sites that represent the most interesting birding localities within this region.

More than 420 species have been recorded, which includes a high proportion of passage migrants and vagrants (just under half of the birds listed are described as being rare or extremely rare visitors). Indeed the peninsula of Cap Gris Nez is on a par with many of our observatories in attracting some great rarities.

Although many of the best birding opportunities occur during migration, this is also an area that supports many breeding species that just fail to reach southeast England. With patience, Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, Kentish Plover *Anarhynchus alexandrinus*, Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*, Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*, Middle-spotted Woodpecker *Dendropicos medius*, Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*, Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio*, Crested Lark

*Galerida cristata*, Crested Tit *Lophophanes cristatus*, Icterine Hippolais *icterina* and Melodious Warblers *H. polyglotta*, Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*, Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla* and Serin *Serinus serinus* can all be found.

The book shows a strong bias towards the sea, with 21 of the locations being close to the coast. Of the remainder, most are to the east between the towns of Béthune, Lille and Valenciennes. All of the available habitat types in the area are covered. Each site is described with coordinates that enable visitors to find the location using GPS. The text explains the route options and offers pointers to the main species including the estimated percentage chance of seeing them. A map for each site includes everything from parking options to paths and hides, and access details for those with physical disabilities. This book – which has text in both English and French – will greatly improve the enjoyment of a visit to the region.

Keith Betton



# Recent reports

Compiled by Barry Nightingale and Harry Hussey

This summary of unchecked reports covers early December to early January 2016.

**Headlines** In another extremely stormy period, exciting arrivals came from all directions but, as is often the case at this time of the year, Ireland provided the top stories, with the tideline corpse of an adult Brown Booby in Co. Cork, an adult Vega Gull in Co. Wexford, an adult Glaucous-winged Gull in Co. Cork, Pacific Diver in Co. Galway, and Hudsonian Whimbrel and an unseasonal Black-browed Albatross in Co. Kerry. Scotland also weighed in with some top-drawer rarities: a Mourning Dove in Shetland, a Brünnich's Guillemot in Orkney and a Little Swift in Lothian. Apart from a Ross's Gull in Cornwall, an inland Bonaparte's Gull in Hertfordshire/Buckinghamshire and an unprecedentedly late Red-rumped Swallow in Norfolk, it was an unremarkable spell in England and Wales, saved only by long-staying rarities including Pacific Diver, Pallid Harrier, Hudsonian Whimbrel, Long-billed Dowitcher, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs all on show.

**Ross's Goose** *Anser rossii* Carstairs Junction (Clyde), 12th–14th December. **Canada Goose** *Branta canadensis* Lissadell (Co. Sligo), race *interior*, long-stayer to 8th January. **Cackling Goose** *Branta hutchinsii* Lissadell, 23rd–30th December; Malin Head (Co. Donegal), 6th January; Berneray (Outer Hebrides), 9th January. **American Wigeon** *Anas americana* Records from Argyll, Devon, Co. Donegal (three), Highland (two), Northeast Scotland, Northumberland and Perth & Kinross. **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* Long-stayers in Co. Durham and Hampshire. **Lesser Scaup** *Aythya affinis* Long-stayers in Avon, Co. Kerry and Shetland, plus a presumed returning bird in Cornwall, 17th December to 10th January; also Gearagh (Co. Cork), 10th December. **King Eider** *Somateria spectabilis* Nairn (Moray & Nairn), 16th and 25th–27th December; Largo Bay (Fife), 27th December to 9th January. **Surf Scoter** *Melanitta perspicillata* Records from Cleveland, Denbighshire (up to five), Fife, Lothian, Shetland and Yorkshire.

**Pacific Diver** *Gavia pacifica* Marazion/Newlyn (Cornwall), long-stayer to 10th January; Tawin (Co. Galway), 5th January. **White-billed Diver** *Gavia adamsii* South Ronaldsay (Orkney), 31st December to 1st January. **Black-browed Albatross** *Thalassarche melanophris* Castlegregory (Co. Kerry), 8th December. **Brown Booby** *Sula leucogaster* Owenahincha (Co. Cork), found dead, 2nd January.

**American Bittern** *Botaurus lentiginosus* Castle-

freke (Co. Cork), long-stayer to 14th December. **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis* Records from Cornwall, Devon (at least two), Norfolk, Somerset (at least two), Suffolk and Co. Wexford. **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* Records from Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Co. Clare (two), Co. Cork (at least 17, possibly as many as 32), Cornwall, Devon, Outer Hebrides, Shetland, Somerset, Staffordshire, Suffolk (two), Sussex, Co. Waterford (20) and Co. Wexford (three).

**Northern Harrier** *Circus hudsonius* North Ronaldsay (Orkney), long-stayer to 26th December. **Pallid Harrier** *Circus macrourus* Snettisham, long-stayer to 15th December, same Flitcham, 16th December to 10th January; another Egmore (all Norfolk), 9th December.

**American Golden Plover** *Pluvialis dominica* Pymoor (Cambridgeshire), 19th–22nd December. **Hudsonian Whimbrel** *Numenius hudsonicus* Marazion (Cornwall), long-stayer again 31st December to 9th January; Tralee (Co. Kerry), 16th December. **Spotted Sandpiper** *Actitis macularius* Pilmore (Co. Cork), long-stayer to 10th January. **Greater Yellowlegs** *Tringa melanoleuca* Whippingham/River Medina (Isle of Wight), long-stayer to 11th January. **Lesser Yellowlegs** *Tringa flavipes* Breydon (Norfolk), long-stayer intermittently to 4th January; Greencastle (Co. Down), 26th December. **Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* Long-stayers: Pennington Marshes (Hampshire), to 10th



## Recent reports

December; Cresswell Pond and Hemscott Hill (both Northumberland), to 10th January.

Brünnich's Guillemot *Uria lomvia* Scapa Bay (Orkney), 8th–11th January.

Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri* Kinvarra (Co. Galway), returning adult, to 10th January. Bonaparte's Gull *Chroicocephalus philadelphia* Dawlish Warren/Exe Estuary (Devon), long-stayer to 10th January; Kirkwall (Orkney), 9th–19th December; Wilstone Resr (Hertfordshire), 4th and 8th–11th January, roosting at College Lake (Buckinghamshire), 9th–10th January. Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea* Lizard Point/Bass Point (Cornwall), 2nd–4th January. American Herring Gull *Larus smithsonianus* Long-stayer in Cornwall, at St Just 9th December, Penzance 20th, and Mousehole 28th–29th December. Vega Gull *Larus smithsonianus vegae* Duncannon (Co. Wexford), 10th January. Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens* Castletownbere (Co. Cork), 2nd–10th January.

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* Scalloway (Shetland), long-stayer to 17th December. Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura* Lerwick (Shetland), 26th December to 11th January. Little Swift *Apus affinis* Thorntonloch (Lothian), 31st December. Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus* North Uist (Outer Hebrides), 21st December to 8th January.

Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* Titchfield Haven, three long-stayers to 13th December, again 29th December to 9th January, same Cosham IBM Lake (both Hampshire), 15th–16th December; Dungeness (Kent), two, 6th–10th January. Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* In Norfolk, one at Cley, 17th–18th December, then various localities between Thornham and Wells-next-the-Sea, 18th–31st December. Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* Ham Wall (Somerset), long-stayer to 10th January; Climping (Sussex), 9th–11th December. Rose-coloured Starling *Pastor roseus* Lizard (Cornwall), long-stayer again 13th December and 1st–8th January. Two-barred Crossbill *Loxia leucoptera* Caithness (Highland), two, 10th December.

### Notable records of commoner species

Pintail *Anas acuta* Edgerley Floods (Shropshire), high count of 1,600, 6th January. Greater Scaup *Aythya marila* Loch Ryan (Dumfries & Galloway), high count of 623, 23rd December. Little Auk *Alle alle* Strong passage in early January, particularly off the eastern coast of Scotland. High counts on 3rd January included 1,163 past Girdle Ness (North-east Scotland), in 90 minutes; 900 past Brora (Highland), in two hours; 844 past Newtonhill (North-east Scotland). Counts on 4th January included 1,016 past Girdle Ness in one hour; 1,100 past Hound Point (Lothian), in 90 minutes; 1,030 past Fife Ness (Fife); 750 past Torness (Lothian), in two hours. Elsewhere, 960 past Fraserburgh (North-east Scotland), 8th January.

There were also good numbers of White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons*, Great Northern Divers *Gavia immer*, Grey Phalaropes *Phalaropus fulicarius* and Little Gulls *Hydrocoloeus minutus*.



Killian Mullaney

62. Adult Vega Gull *Larus smithsonianus vegae*, Duncannon, Co. Wexford, January 2016.

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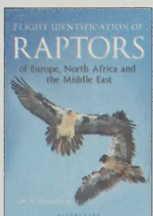
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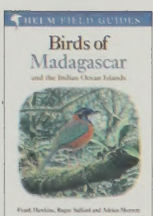


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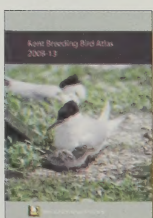


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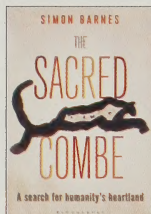
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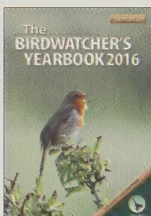


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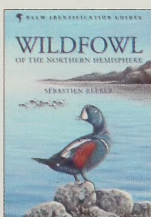


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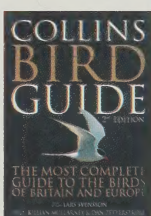


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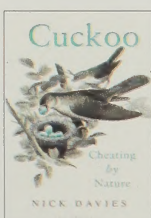
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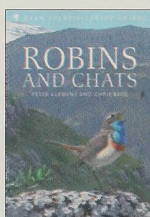
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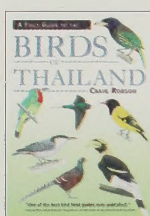
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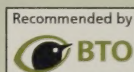
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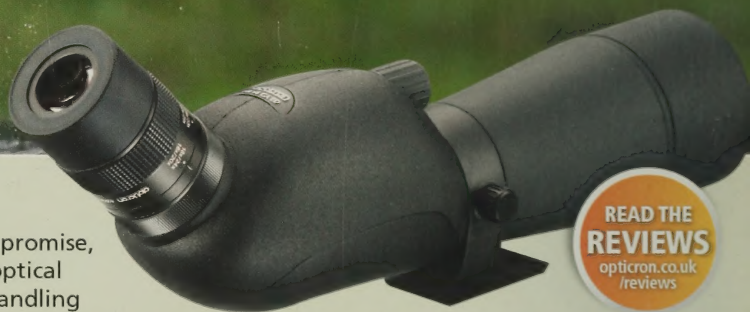
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